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HOOD: *Miss Kilmansegg's Leg*

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	GOLDEN EGGS	1
II.	THE HOARD	8
III.	THE CURIOSITY SHOP	17
IV.	KATE	31
V.	THE COLLAR	41
VI.	A KING CUP	49
VII.	LIGHTS IN THE DARK	60
VIII.	AN OLD BATTLE-FIELD	69
IX.	WHAT DID HE GET BY IT?	79
X.	FRIAR'S LANTERN	88
XI.	THE ARCHÆOLOGISTS	95
XII.	OLD AND NEW	105
XIII.	THE NORTH LYCH TREASURE	113
XIV.	NEW HOMES	122
XV.	A FINCH TRANSFORMED	130
XVI.	THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN	139

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVII.	THE TORQUE	144
XVIII.	TO THE RESCUE	153
XIX.	THE CHAMPION	162
XX.	WHIN COMMON	170
XXI.	POSITIVE	179
XXII.	THE DISCOVERY	185

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

PAGE

WALTER TRYING ON THE ULSTER ..... (*Frontispiece*)

"MY SON, YOU WANT TO BE A FINE GENTLEMAN!" 107

CHRIS CREDITON COMES TO KATE'S RESCUE 158

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THE TREASURES IN THE MARSHES

CHAPTER I.

GOLDEN EGGS.

I'm on Tommy Tidler's ground
Picking up gold and silver.
Nursery Rhyme.

THE lapwings were flying round and round, screaming out their long, lazy "pee-weet, pee-weet," showing a great deal more of the white lining of their broad wings than of their dark shining green bodies, and nothing at all of their beautiful crests. One in particular floated sometimes on high, sometimes near the ground, pee-weeting most lamentably from time to time to catch the attention of the only other living thing to be seen, which kept all the birds hovering on the alert, though, excepting that

it moved, it was hardly to be distinguished from the pale drab brown tint of the surroundings.

For all seemed at first sight of the colour of dead bents of grass or reed: a perfectly flat scene, with a grey cloudy sky overhead, and a grey pale river, with a few lighter and brighter patches creeping through the midst. If there were a few wooded banks or houses bounding it, they were a great way off and shrouded, too, in the grey mist so as to be hardly visible.

Those who listened might have heard cheery larks high in the sky, above and beyond the lapwings, and those who looked might have seen green blades of grass, and here and there broad leaves and golden blossoms of kingcups peeping out along the borders of the pools and streams, whose waters ultimately found their way to the river Awe—a broad one just in this place, though so sluggish that it did not seem to know which way it was going; but it overflowed sometimes, and spread out far over the banks that were traced chiefly by clumps of reeds, and by withies and sallows which were bearing their silver rabbit's-tail buds. At such things, however, that one moving figure never looked. He was in quest of

the eggs of the lapwings, which were trying to beguile him away from their nests, with all that flapping and dodging and pretending to be maimed, poor things! which only made him laugh to himself, and slouch along in the opposite direction, keeping a keen eye on the little rills and pools left by the river's recent overflow. There he might, by good-hap, spy a trout also, left behind by the river, which might, if fine, be privately disposed of; if not, would help out the supper. Any way, plovers' eggs were sure of a good price at Awmouth, and the market people would take them in. Walter Bulfinch was out of work just now; boys of sixteen were not wanted in the present state of bleak east wind, and he was one of those lads whom farmers always dismiss the first—not that he was a bad boy on the whole, but he was one of those who never could go on long at steady work. He would find that he must stand up to straighten his back, or to blow on his fingers, before other people concerned themselves about theirs, and to hear the hounds anywhere about put him quite beyond his wits.

Mr. Hunter—Old Hunks, as it was the fashion in North Lychford to call him—was not the man

to stand such nonsense, and instead of remembering that Walter's mother was a widow, what he did remember was that "Bill Bully," as every one named his father, had been more than suspected of poaching, and that the keepers had not been at all sorry when he died of a lung attack, caught, as they said, "where he didn't ought to have been." So the Saturday after Walter had been caught with his hands in his pockets shouting after the hounds, instead of hoeing the turnips, he was told that there was nothing for him to do next week.

His mother had regular washing, so it was not starvation, but it was much less comfortable than when he was bringing in something, and he was doing his best by the search in the meadows, which he liked a great deal better than turnip-hoeing.

He had robbed three or four nests of their pretty brown speckled eggs, holding them up to the light to be sure that they had not been set upon, and never heeding the screaming and wailing of the parents, when, under a cluster of reeds not far from the river, he saw something not at all like a plover's egg—something bright, in the midst

of the bared roots and black peaty stuff. He plunged in his hand, and pulled out something black and dirty, but unmistakably a coin, and he thought, black as it was, that it was silver.

Too thin for a sixpence! Was it a threepenny bit? No, it was an odd sort of coin. He thought there was a cross on it, but could not be sure, though he put it in his mouth and cleaned it a little. It was very thin and much worn. Of course he tried again, and this time out came a whole handful—yes, one, two, three handfuls of the like—of something besides, too, that was not money, broken bits of metal. He really believed it might be gold, only if it were not, how he should be laughed at! Down on his knees he went, grubbing and grasping, sometimes only getting hold of a root or a bit of wood; but once there was a piece of very rusty chain, which probably had supported a leathern bag, for all was close together in that one hole, and at the bottom was a delicate collar or necklet, made apparently of scales fitting into one another. There did not seem to be more at hand, and Walter, who had given a low whistle of exultation at each discovery, thought it high time to carry the whole in his

basket home to his mother, especially as it was getting dark.

The peewits needed not to trouble themselves about him now; he had got better game than was to be found in their nests, and he tramped and plodded across the bog, not much minding where he was going, sometimes one foot sinking in, sometimes splashing through a pool before he came to the path, such as it was, and thence out into a higher field or two beyond which lay the village of North Lychford, or rather a hamlet of the main body of the village, which rose higher on the sloping ground. As Walter plunged over a gap in the broken hedge, instead of going on by the path, a rough voice called out, "You young rascal! what be after breaking my hedges for?" and there was Farmer Hunter in his trap.

"Ha'n't done no harm—huntsmen broke 'em before."

Which was true enough, so Mr. Hunter only made a flourish with his driving whip towards him, and shouted, "No need to be making them worse. If I catch you again—! Hey, what have you got there?"

"Plovers' eggs," sulkily returned Walter; "a chap must do some'at."

"Grump!" again went the farmer. "Mind—if I find you at your father's ways, I'll—"

What he would do was lost, as his horse hurried off; but Walter stood muttering, "Who turned me off, I'd like to know—"

Walter was very far from a model boy, but a kind word or even a civil one might have made all the difference just then.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOARD.

What is here?
Gold? Yellow, glittering, precious gold.
SHAKESPEARE, *Timon of Athens.*

MRS. BULFINCH was a tall, hearty, capable-looking woman, who, as the ladies said, "could wash," and that is a rare power in these days of half learning and half doing things; since, for one woman that does wash and iron respectably, there are five who pretend to do so, and will neither take pains nor submit to have fault found with them.

Her hands had pretty well kept the family through all the uncertainties of her husband's lifetime, and she was rather better than worse off since his death, because those who had looked coldly on him were glad to help her, as a struggling industrious woman. Her elder children

were all out in the world, one boy a sailor, another a soldier in India; and another had gone off to navvy work no one knew where, and her only daughter was in service. It was a rather desolate-looking, untidy cottage to which Walter took his way, outside at least, for the mud walls looked far from straight, and the thatch bulged down on one side, while the gate had lost its hinges and was kept together by a rope and a withe. There were no flowering plants in the garden except two or three primroses, the blossoms of which the sparrows picked off as fast as they opened; but there were tolerable beds of vegetables coming up on either side, and clean white linen hung fluttering from the lines on the posts—irregular, untrimmed sticks of timber—and there came grunt, grunt from within a tumbledown pig-sty, as if the inmate knew Walter's step, and expected his supper.

Mrs. Bulfinch had her hands busy over her ironing, and the clergyman's housekeeper, a very grand personage, was sitting on a chair by her table, waiting for the handkerchiefs that were wanted in a hurry, as her master was going from home the next day.

"Well, Walter," she said, "'twas a bad job that

Mr. Hunter turned you off! Have you got taken on again?"

"No"—in an offended voice.

"You ought to be looking out. A great lad like you to be on your poor mother's hands!"

Walter did not think it was any business of Mrs. Rowe's, and was glad when his mother said, "Wat is ever so useful to me about odd jobs when he is out of work."

"You would be a foolish woman to keep him idling. I should think you have had enough of that. What have you got there, boy?"

"Plovers' eggs," responded Walter, not at all inclined to tell her any more.

"Let me see them. If they are fresh, the Vicar might like a few for his breakfast, or maybe to take some up to his sister."

"I'll take 'em out," gruffly said Walter, retreating into the back kitchen. All the habits of secrecy and caution learnt in his father's time were aroused, but both his mother and Mrs. Rowe could perceive that the basket was heavier than the plovers' eggs accounted for, and Mrs. Rowe, who thought it was a rabbit, uttered a hope that he had been after no mischief. Walter came back

with only the eggs; one had been broken, and was making a pretty mess over the rest of his treasures.

Mrs. Rowe held each up to the light suspiciously, and haggled over them, declaring that if he found those, there must be more to find; but she ended by leaving sixpence for them and carrying off them and her handkerchiefs.

"Well, Watty, what is it? Whatever have you got?" asked his mother.

Walter made a face, and giggled in an odd way as he said, "Come into the back shed and see."

Black earth, and the yoke of the egg, together with the dimness of tarnish, hid the lustre of the first piece so much that Mrs. Bulfinch exclaimed:

"Bless the lad! he has been and got hold of an old tin pot."

"Tin pot, indeed!" said Walter. "Look, mother," and he brought out a handful of the little coins.

"Well I never! But it is all black and thin! It ain't proper money."

"Worth more—ever so much more than proper money! Why, at the old Jew Isaacs' at Awmouth I saw a whole tray of rum-looking money,

and there was a silver bit as big as a half-crown marked at ten bob! Look there now!"

He had succeeded in cleaning the coin enough to show that it was silver, had a head on one side, and a cross on the other.

"Well, to be sure!" repeated Mrs. Bulfinch. "Where ever did you find it?"

"Down in the marsh, just by one of the gutters, when I was looking for eggs. But that's not all, mother! Here be bits of all sorts, and I can tell you it is a deal too heavy for it to be tin or old iron. Why!" after a little rubbing and scraping—"it's yellow! is it gold?"

"My!" exclaimed his mother, weighing it in her hand, "I do believe it is. Brass never would heft so much, and would be green. Bless me, Wat, this is a find! Where ever did you come by it? In the gutters, do you say?"

"Ay, where the river has been out. In ever such a wet place." As indeed Walter's boots testified. "Here's a golden thing, too," he added, taking out the collar.

"My word! It seems quite whole! Any lady might wear it, if it was but clean. Trumpery all of it!" she said, changing her mind. "One

can't see what the things be, they are in such a muck."

"We'll put 'em into a pail, and wash 'em up, first of all," said Walter, "then we shall see what the things be."

So, after fastening the doors and drawing a curtain across the window, the contents of the basket were turned out into a zinc pail, and water poured over them. Wat set to work on them with a birch broom, and his mother put a red crock by his side, telling him she would have no mess made on the floor (which was only of cracked tiles after all). She did not half believe in the treasures, and began to get the tea ready.

She called Wat to come and eat, and would not light the lamp yet for him to see the various fragments and coins he touched in the twilight. "Depend on it," she said, "the whole rubbishing lot is not worth wasting paraffin for."

However, she changed her mind a little when, it being now quite dark, the lamp was lighted, and Wat showed what he had been rubbing up on his trousers. It certainly was like gold; a broken piece apparently of a cup, for it curved, and there was a costly pattern chased upon it.

"Some one stole it and threw the bag away," said Mrs. Bulfinch, "when the police was after them. Or else hid it, and forgot the place."

"It's so old," said Walter, "not like things now-a-days."

"I tell you this," holding up the collar, "is just like what I have seen when I was in service, in advertisement pictures of ladies' ornaments; and a pretty thing it is, to be sure. See, all the joints lap one over the other, like a lobster's tail. It must be worth something, if it is real! It is luck, Watty man, if only it don't bring us into trouble!"

"What shall we do with it, mammie? 'Twas Old Hunks's ground, but he slanged me so as I wasn't going to show it to him! Must I—did I ought, mother?"

"Bless the boy! what should you do that for? The old skinflint!" said Mrs. Bulfinch, "it ain't none of his, nor ever had been; it was your luck to find it, and we have the best right to make what we can by it."

Walter was half puzzled. He had always been a fairly honest boy, except in the matter of poaching, to which he had been brought up; and if he had found a purse on the road, and been able to

trace the owner, he would have restored it; but his mother's view satisfied him. Moreover, it was pretty certain that he would not have got much of a reward had he carried it to the farmer. That there are laws about treasure-trove neither of them knew, nor perhaps would it have made much difference if they had.

They turned all the treasure over, cleaned it as well as they could, and examined it. There were a good many broken pieces of gold and silver, twenty perhaps, as if two or three precious vessels had been broken for convenience of carriage, some very green bits of brass, a few stones, a bit of a chain, the collar, and at least a hundred and sixty of the coins, none larger than a shilling, very much tarnished, some broken, all very thin, but certainly silver.

"Well, that's what I call luck," said Mrs. Bulfinch, going to the old chest, and taking out her old workbox, once polished, but scratched on the lid; and with all the divisions within broken down, but still with lock and key. "There, that will hold 'em all safe," she said, turning the key and putting it into her pocket.

"But what's to be done with them?" asked

Walter, rather vexed at having them put out of his reach.

"I'll think about that. Don't you be afraid. You shall have your own as has a right to it. Only don't you go blabbing to nobody about what you have found, as you'll get yourself and all of us into trouble."

"I'll go down and see if I can find any more."

"You might do that, as if 'twas peewits' eggs; but don't if others want to come with you, as it will be all up with our chances. Come, we'd better get off to bed, or some one will be coming to know why the lamp is alight so late."

So mother and son went to bed, very conscious of the hoard in the chest, but neither of them with any prayers.

CHAPTER III.

THE CURIOSITY SHOP.

Setting the *how much* before the *how*,
Cry, with the daughters of the horse-leech, Give.
TENNYSON.

WALTER wanted to begin consulting about the treasure the first thing in the morning, but his mother stopped his mouth directly. "I tell you what, my son: I won't have no talking about what's in there. If we once begin giving tongue about it, there will be no stopping, and we shall have trouble with it."

"I was only going to say that maybe the young parson would tell us what that money is and what it is worth."

"Ay, and tell about it all over the place, and the next thing would be that you would be had up for stealing Farmer Hunter's money, or maybe worse —if that there broken ware came from any of the gentlefolks' houses round about. As is like enow,

we'd have the police poking about us, and, any way, if we did not get harm, we should get no good out of it, if we let the gentry get wind of it."

"They would sure not *do* us out of it?"

"I wouldn't trust them. They'd say, 'Here's a half-crown,' or, mayhap, 'half-a-sovereign for your trouble, and because you are an honest boy,' if you please! and then they would make pounds and pounds out of it, that did ought to belong to you. Oh yes, I've seen their ways. Why, there was Miss Clavering. I saw her come in with a teapot all over ugly green beastisses, with their faces upside down, and heard her tell how she had got it out of an old granny for five shillings; and she sold it, yes she did, at a bazaar, for five pounds, and not a farthing beyond the five shillings ever went to the poor old granny."

"That was mean," cried Walter, indignantly. "But what will you do then, mam?"

"Take this basket home to Mrs. Scales," practically answered Mrs. Bulfinch, "and bring back the fresh lot. Then, if I have time after I have put the things to soak, why, I'll put on my bonnet, and go to Awmouth, and take a bit of that black grimy-looking money, and maybe a bit of the

other stuff, and see what old Mr. Isaacs says to it."

"Tell him all about it?" asked Walter.

"I shall do as I sees fit," answered Mrs. Bulfinch oracularly. Nor would she allow one word to pass about the treasure, while she and her son, carrying a great white-covered flasket between them, walked up the long lane to the main body of the village, which was rather a neglected-looking place, the little low square-towered church seeming half sunk into the ground, and the Rectory, with great handsome trees, quite overtopping it.

The Rector, whose handkerchiefs had been hurried last night, drove out at that moment from the gate in a brougham, and, as he drew up the window, gave a friendly nod to the mother and son. His Curate, who had been seeing him off, came out the same minute.

"Good morning, Mrs. Bulfinch; good morning, Wat," he said, touching his broad hat before Walter's salutation. "Heard of any work yet?"

"No, sir."

"I dare say your mother finds you very useful meantime."

He passed on with such a friendly smile that,

if Mrs. Bulfinch had not been present, and if Walter had not been rather startled by the story of the teapot with the green monsters, he would have been moved to confide the story of the find, for his relations with this same Curate had always been pleasant, though the same could not be said of those with the Rector or with the schoolmistress.

The basket of clothes was exchanged for another, after which Mrs. Bulfinch was glad enough to dispose of Walter with a hunch of bread, spread with the dripping she had got from Mrs. Scales, to go and renew his search for the treasure under cover of looking for plovers' eggs.

However, the poor lapwings were in greater commotion than ever, for two boys, one woman, and one girl were all trying to rifle their nests for the following day's market; and the last thing Walter wished was to show the way to the spot where he had made his discovery. Yet he wished to hover about, much after the pattern of the birds, so as to make sure that they were not lighting upon it. The matter, however, was soon settled, for the vehement outcries of "pee-weet" actually called the farmer to the birds' assistance, and he was presently seen at the gate, shouting, "Holloa

there! be off with you! I won't have trespassers on my land."

So they all had to clear out, and the boys betook themselves to a far less hopeful field beyond, which was out of Farmer Hunter's jurisdiction. The lapwings did not profit much by the change, for the farmer sent down one of his boys, and a basket of eggs was carried by him to market the next morning.

There were those who looked at it as if he had been cheating them, although he was quite within his rights. Money was more scarce with him than they guessed, but there was no doubt that he was a hard man, and did things in a harsh manner; and this had helped to make Mrs. Bulfinch secretive and suspicious of all who were better off than herself. She had been well brought up, and had been in fair services: but she had married a man, handsome and amusing, but of irregular, unsteady, poaching habits. She had worked hard and industriously, and often the whole family had depended on her; but her standard of right and wrong had been pulled down insensibly; she had learnt to connive at and conceal much that she would not have done herself, and to view every

one who could call her husband or her sons to account as a natural enemy to be avoided as much as possible, in spite of their laundry-work, their soup, and their blankets.

So, as soon as she had put her clothes to soak, she dressed herself in her neat round black hat and jacket; and after much consideration, with the doors fastened, she fished out of the box in the chest one broken bit of a vase and two of the blackened coins, tied them up in a handkerchief, put them in her pocket, took a basket to carry soap and blue, in case any one should ask her why she was going to Awmouth; and set out on her walk, which she was resolved to take alone, lest Walter should disclose too much by his eagerness.

If she had any visions in her head, they were of making something good of this for Walter, her youngest, her brightest, and her darling, even beyond his only sister Kate, a year older. What had she not gone through when those two were babies, whose coming long after the rest she could have spared, and now that they were fine, strong-limbed, dark-eyed young people, she still loved them above all the rest, and had indulged them to a point that made steady employment very hard

to them, so that Kate was far too apt to turn up at home again "out of place."

Awmouth was a little harbour town, at the mouth of that same river Awe which ran between the two Lychfords. There were beyond the tidy, respectable High Street, the wharves, not very new or in very good order, serving as a landing-place for the grimy colliers, the little traders, the shabby little steamers, and the fishing vessels, some of which were always to be seen, and whose rough-looking sailors hung round the sea-wall and railings, smoking pipes, and sometimes refreshing themselves at the various public-houses which seemed really to alternate with the shops that displayed sea clothing, sea fittings, provisions, tobacco, and the like, all in a small shabby way.

It was to the corner one of these that Mrs. Bulfinch took her way. It was full of all sorts of things. At the door was a Japanese basket chair, not to be sat upon, for there was in it a tall grimed feather broom, also a green china image of a monster with a broken tail, and a dish of little shells and Indian shot; also two cats with bodies made of snails' shells, with plaster heads, painted eyes, little shells for ears, and whiskers made from

brushes. The window was full of china plates, odd baskets, odder boxes, and, oddest of all, a nodding Mandarin, or rather one who ought to have nodded and moved his hands.

Inside, it was not easy to move between chairs, tables, chests, and the like, none new, and all loaded with the greatest variety of things, wearing apparel, stuffed birds, in cases or not, but all apt to be moth-eaten and mangy. Chinese lanterns, ostrich and emu eggs hung from the roof, and the counter was covered with glass cases containing coral, pebble, or glass jewellery, and the like, and on the top of this again were trays and baskets with other curiosities; little gaudy French pictures, too, sometimes of the Blessed Virgin or of Saints.

The little man behind the counter, with his sharp hooked nose, twinkling eyes, grizzled black hair and red whiskers, as if he had made himself up for a figure of a Jew, was well known to be ready to buy anything of any sort; whether at a small auction, from sailors when they came home, or from the people in the town and villages. Some things he only took as being the medium of conveyance to other shops; some he kept for sale

on his own account; and he had a reputation among the gentry as having great bargains in the way of curiosities to dispose of, to those who would hunt them out, little guessing how "old Isaacs" was secretly chuckling at the sagacity they thought they showed, and the prices they were ready to give.

Mrs. Bulfinch had often had dealings with him, for though he never professed to deal in game, "Bill Bully" had found it by far the safest way to send a hare, rabbits, or pheasants in his wife's basket, and leave Isaacs to dispose of them, sometimes, indeed, to the poulterer, but more often to clever housewives, who would have thought it extravagant to go to a poulterer's shop, and believed themselves to get their game cheaper and more privately in this way.

Mrs. Bulfinch amused herself with looking at a great rough coat and a long ulster, and wondering how much the stains would show, and whether the soiled and torn lining could be mended, until the other customers had been cleared off, and Mr. Isaacs turned his pointed chin to her blandly, asking, "What can I do for you, miss?"

(He always called people in hats Miss, as it

flattered them to be supposed to be young girls.)

She came forward with one of the little coins in her hand, and said, "Well, sir, could you tell me the worth of this, and if it be real silver?"

"Eh!" he said, taking it in his hand, and looking at it with an eye rather like an old magpie. "Many folks bring bits like this, but for the most part they are only bank tokens, just worth nothing at all! Where did this come from, if I may ask so much?"

"Well, my son found it, digging," said Mrs. Bulfinch, who had made up her mind to explain thus much, but still put in a word of untruth, from some strange notion that it was safer.

"Ah! there's a lot of worthless stuff lying about that the lads come on digging, and this is so thin I can bend it with my nail. See."

"But it is real silver."

The dealer went through some manœuvres, and convinced himself that it was so. Then he said, "Ah! well, 'tis about the value of a sixpence. I would not mind about giving the little fellow that or a shilling just to encourage him."

"Little fellow! he is as tall as I am," ex-

claimed Mrs. Bulfinch, indignantly. "He knows what he is after, and if he don't get the full worth of this, it ain't hard to go to one of the jewellers or silversmiths to find out the value."

"Trust them for looking after their own interest! They! Why, they'd tell you a coin wasn't worth a button, when maybe it would bring in five-and-twenty pound in their fine shop windows! And now I come to look at it, this might be better than one of those card-players' tokens. Did you say you had any more of them?"

Mrs. Bulfinch felt in her pocket, and there was a jingling which brought out a gleam from the Jew's black eyes. Those two were a curious sight, neither trusting the other, nor disclosing anything more than could be helped, yet each afraid of giving offence or losing the bargain. Isaacs really suspected the woman of having come by the coin by unlawful means, but he perceived that she had more behind, and did not wish to alienate her or frighten her. He was quite as ignorant of the real value of the coins, or even of the piece of the vase, as she was, except by their weight as metal; but it was quite worth his while, and she thought it worth hers, to make the best of each other

without going further. The fragment was certainly gold, and he thought the work on it very old and curious, but he would not tell her so.

"Did you hear," said he, "that there had been a burglary a month or so ago at the hotel here at Awmouth?" and he scanned her face knowingly. "There was a plate-chest taken with old curious goods in it, belonging to a gent, a sort of philosopher, but the thieves got clear off, though the pieces of the chest were found broken up."

"Ah! where was that?" she asked.

"Where was the chest found? Oh! down by the river. Maybe they had to drop the plate, or else to put it in hiding."

"I never heard nothing of it, no never, I didn't," said Mrs. Bulfinch, heaping her negatives together, with perfect truth, though Isaacs rather gathered an affirmative from them, and thought that possibly she had some knowledge of the matter. At any rate he believed that these things might have been part of the spoil of the philosopher, as he called the unfortunate antiquary; and in fact so did she, since the thieves, when pursued, might have got rid of them in the marsh.

So she listened while he said, "Now if you'll

take my advice, miss, you'll not make too free with anything you have found. Here are marks on it, and these are old coins that could be identified sure enough. The gent has left the description with the police, you may take your oath of it. Best bring it to me. As to the silver bits, I'll send one to a nephew of mine up in London who can dispose of it without suspicion, and for this gold I'll melt it up at once, so as to be all safe, and give you the value according to the weight, and that will be all square. Then, if there's any more of it," he added, peering into her eyes, "you might bring it to me by degrees, bit by bit, you know, and then nobody would suspect anything."

Mrs. Bulfinch thought this was the best she could do. She saw the piece of gold, with the curious pattern of circles, weighed, and heard the Jew declare the amount in Troy weight, but schooling did not go so far in her days, so she could not follow his reckoning.

He proceeded, however, to propose to her to take the ulster she had been studying as part of the payment, telling her what it had been worth when new. It was good cloth, and well made, and not *very* dirty, and Walter really wanted a great-

coat, so she made up her mind to take it. She also carried home half-a-sovereign, much needed for the rent at quarter-day, and eighteen pence for the two coins for Walter's diversion. Much as she required warmer petticoats, and though the wind seemed blowing right through the black serge that looked so neat, the loving mother never so much as thought of providing anything for herself out of the spoils.

But had she done as much for the best for herself and her son as if her first thought had been not what was prudent before man, but what was right before God?

CHAPTER IV.

KATE.

And yet her nature was as frank
  And face as mountain air,
The clouds that gathered on her brow
  Would never tarry there.

MRS. SEWELL, *Ballads.*

WALTER was looking out for his mother when she came home, tired, but with the sense that she had done well for him, and quite expecting him to be pleased with the big coat that she had carried home, and which had grown heavier and heavier every furlong. But when, in answer to his "What have you got?" she unrolled it, his countenance fell.

"Naught but an old second-hand ulster. That there Jew must have done you."

"But look, Wat, it is real good cloth—will wear ever so long, look handsome, and keep you dry."

"I hate an ulster! Gets about one's legs—mucky old thing! How it stinks of old baccy!"

Under other circumstances, Walter thought tobacco the most charming scent in the world.

"Well, I can take out the lining and put it in fresh," said his mother, with a sigh of disappointment. "Just look—such good stuff, it must have cost pounds and pounds new. No shoddy there."

"I'd rather have new shoddy than a stinking old thing like this," said Walter, sulkily.

"You can change it, if you won't have it," said the poor mother, "but I did fancy you would have been pleased. Try it on, *do.*"

"How much did you give for it?" asked the ungracious boy.

She told him all the history of her bargaining, and explained that not a word must be said to any one, not even to Kate, if they chanced to see her. "She is a good maid, but maids have tongues."

Walter nodded. All the while he sat on the table with his hands in his pockets, and his hat on his head, never heeding that she was bustling about, tired as she was, to revive the fire, boil up the kettle, and get the tea ready. He only grunted now and then, and made such observations here and there as "Rum old chap," or "He knew

what he was at." When she handed him the eighteen pence, he made a face at it. "What! Is this all I am to have, when I found it all? I don't call that fair!"

"Well, you know, Wattie dear, if you went and spent a lot all at once, it might bring you into trouble."

Perhaps he saw the force of this, for he gave a long whistle, but added: "Haven't you got nothing else? I thought at least you would have got somewhat good for a feast after such a find."

Mrs. Bulfinch was obliged to confess that she had never thought of it. Men do think so much more of eating and drinking than do women, to whom the preparation is only a burthen. At this, Walter broke out into insistence that he would have something good for supper. He wasn't going to have naught but tea and bread and salt butter —pooh! when all the find was his doing. His mother must give him some of the tin to get something with.

Rent, did she say? Stuff and nonsense! She had only to change another of those gold bits to pay the rent for a year, let alone a quarter.

He said so much that her thrifty mind yielded to

the sense that it was hard that the poor lad should not have some pleasure out of his own discovery, and she actually gave him a florin out of the tea-pot where her quarter's rent was accumulating. He walked off with it, whistling, while she fed the pig and bestirred herself about her other business.

Happily he was not old enough for it to be a temptation to linger at the "White Stag" for the sake of company, and he came back with a quart pot of ale, a string of sausages, and a bit of bacon and fresh butter.

It did not take very long before a savoury meal was made ready, and after it Walter was in much better humour, and condescended to try on the ulster, by the light of the little paraffin lamp.

While he was stretching in it, and considering whether the sleeves were too long, there was a hand on the door, which they had not fastened up, and a girl opened it, with a little curtsey, then a scream of laughter.

"Wat! Wat! I thought it was a gentleman! What a swell you are—I thought 'twas the doctor!"

"Kate! Kate!"—as she hugged them both—but Mrs. Bulfinch's first cry was, "You bain't out of place again?"

"I've got another situation, and better wages," returned Kate. "I would not write to tell you beforehand till 'twas settled, you would be so put about. It is with *real* gentlefolks, twelve pounds a year, mammy, and four servants kept—to help housemaid and in the kitchen."

"I hope you will keep it," said Mrs. Bulfinch, as severely as ever she spoke to her pretty Kate. "Oh dear, you want some supper, and I am afraid Wat has finished all the beer."

"Never mind, mother dear, I'm temperance, and could only have a drop of tea or coffee," said Kate. "My!" as the last sausage was produced to be warmed up. "I'm come in good time, it seems, and I'm ever so hungry—walked from Bridgeworth."

Kate Bulfinch was a pleasant sight as she took off her little round velvet-trimmed hat with two round, fuzzy, scarlet balls, which she called pompons, and showed her neat dark hair, bright soft black eyes, and brown face very like her brother's, only a good deal more refined, from living in houses with more shelter and more washing.

Kate had been at first a very naughty small child at the village school, then an exceedingly

good and bright girl, the prime scholar and favourite of the young lady who helped at the Sunday School for a few years. In fact, she was a susceptible, impressionable creature, who depended very much on her surroundings. She was quite sincere when she was with good people, but she led two lives, as it were—a home and a school life—and the two threads were not well twisted together into one line, though, poor child! it was hardly her own fault.

She was not quite in her teens when she went to "a little place." She was now seventeen, and in those four years and a half she had been in seven situations. She left the first because she was really not strong enough for it, and had a pain in her side; the second, because she left the perambulator in the sun while she gossiped; the third, because she would tell the children to deny that she had given them sweets; the fourth, because she did not like hashed meat; the fifth, because she was not allowed her Sunday evenings out; the sixth, by no fault of her own, but because of a break-up of the establishment; the last, as she now explained, because the lodgers were going away, and she would not be wanted, so that her

mistress had recommended her to a family who had been staying at Bridgeworth, and were going to their home in another county in a week's time.

"It is a long way!" sighed Mrs. Bulfinch.

"Not so long as you think, mother; it is only two hours by rail, and I do want to get farther off, and start fresh. I'm sorry to leave Alice Crediton, but I'm sick of Awmouth and Bridgeworth."

There was a good deal in this. Their registry offices knew Kate Bulfinch a great deal too well; and she did not fancy hearing, "So here you are again." All her seven mistresses had, however, said she was a good girl to work, honest, and good-tempered, but she had been silly, frivolous, disobedient, self-willed, and sometimes untruthful, and there was something discreditable in changing so often. So that, though she had not written beforehand, and though she had come home to wish her mother good-bye, and bring her her last gifts and five shillings out of her wages, she only came for two nights. She had left her box with her mistress at Bridgeworth, and did not wish to be seen by the neighbours, who would

hold up their hands and say, "Well, I never!" and talk about bad shillings.

"You don't go for a week, you say," observed Mrs. Bulfinch, wistfully, when the gifts had been duly admired. "Then couldn't you stay over Sunday, and I should see a little more of you."

"Oh no, I couldn't. I must get back for the rehearsal. Didn't I tell you? There's to be such a grand temperance fête on Tuesday as never was. Why don't you belong to the temperance, Wat?"

"Catch me," was Walter's answer.

"What's the good?" returned his mother. "The lad never was fond of drink, nor I either! I'm sure I never taste it but by chance from one week's end to another."

"It's all very well for women-folk," put in Walter, "but a man must have some'at to do his work on."

"Whom are you working for now, Wat?" asked Kate, quite innocently; but Walter answered angrily, "There's no such thing as working for Old Hunks. He is a foul-tongued old fellow, as is at one for nothing at all."

"Oh!" said Kate, in a meaning voice.

"You need not talk," said Walter. "You that never keep a place six months."

"Come, come," broke in the mother; "I can't abide words. What's this about a fête, did you say, Kate?"

"There's to be ever such a fête on Tuesday," she returned. "A great tea, where all the ladies take tables, and it is who will have the best cakes and muffins and cream and jam. Oh! won't we stuff!" smacking her lips; while Walter growled under his voice, "Greedy pigs! and then go on at a poor chap having a pint."

"That's not all," went on Kate; "for there are ladies and gentlemen—reverend gentlemen high up in the Church—coming to address us, and they do make moving speeches. Oh! I do love a moving speech that makes you cry enough to break your heart!"

"As much as buttered muffin," muttered Walter, but she did not heed him.

"All about brutes of men beating their poor little babies to death, and mothers pawning their babies' last rag, till one is just in 'sterics, and ready to take a dozen pledges."

"How can you tell when you haven't heard them?" asked Walter.

"Oh! I've heard lots of them. Once a week some one goes on at the hall. But that's not all.

There's to be a concert, and I'm to sing, mother—I'm to sing in all the choruses—and to recite. I'm to recite 'Exit Tommy.' You would like to hear it, mother; it is so sweet."

So Kate stood up and repeated that very pretty and tender poem of Langbridge's with a good deal of feeling and so much effect that one of her audience cried and the other snored.

CHAPTER V.

THE COLLAR.

A bracelet on her wrist.
SCOTT, *St. John's Eve.*

WALTER and Kate were very fond of each other, but when they were small children it was the sort of affection that seems to be worked up through a great deal of wrangling, and though in these after-years they were always very happy to meet, it does not tend to peace to have a great lad lounging about a house with nothing to do, and no willingness to do the things he might find ready to hand, such as cleaning out the pig-sty, or pulling up the weeds which were beginning to show in the garden.

He said the sty would soon be as dirty again, and the weeds were too small to be worth pulling up—which, unfortunately, was too much the principle on which his mother had brought up her children.

Kate, however, was never idle, and while her mother was elbow-deep in her wash-tub in the back kitchen, she was mending his stockings, while he sat upon the table and kicked his heels in a way that quite provoked her. In the complacent recollection of the five shillings and the warm gloves she had brought her mother, and the bright crimson tie she had given him, she began to bestow good advice on him, about finding work, a great big chap like him, and being a burthen on his mother.

Walter laughed in a meaning sort of way. "That's all you know about it," he said.

"Walter! you've not been after the birds again?"

"Not a bit of it! Ah, ha! But I know some one as has got ever so much more in one afternoon than all your fine coach-wheel there. Ay, or than you would get in a year by scrubbing pans!"

"I have twelve pounds a year and all found," said Kate, proudly.

Walter laughed the more, perhaps with a little more zest because his mother called out, "Don't be snapping and quarrelling there," and teasing her amused him.

"I'm not quarrelling," called back Kate; "I only want to know what Walter is at."

"Ah! wouldn't you like it?" he returned.

"Come, I'm sure there's some secret! One would think you had found a purse of gold sovereigns."

This was so near the fact that both laughed, and then it all came out, amid Mrs. Bulfinch's injunctions to Kate never to breathe a word about it to living soul, and the girl's promises to that effect. Of course she burnt to see the hoard; but her mother insisted that the inner box should only be opened upstairs, out of sight of chance arrivals, unless Kate would wait till night, which of course she would not do. So the workbox was carried up, and all the contents spread out on Mrs. Bulfinch's bed. Kate was not much interested in the coins, nor in the broken pieces of metal, but she was in raptures with the collar, which she said was "a duck" and "a perfect love," and she wanted to try it on; but there was no fastening to undo, and as she had a great deal of pretty brown hair, very nicely kept and plaited, it would not go on, but stuck fast at her ears, making quite a white mark round her cheeks, while Walter

stood laughing at her, and declaring that, if she once got it on, she would have to wear it for life, unless she cut either it or all her hair off.

As it was, she did not get out of it very easily, but then she wound it round her wrist, which it encircled twice, very prettily, "Just like," she said, "the bangles that ladies wear. O Wat, dear! do let me have it for my own—it does look so sweet! Don't let the old Jew get it to melt up. Such an awful pity!"

"Well, I don't see why you shouldn't. It's a trumpery thing, all hollow, very thin and light," said Walter, giving it a twist with his hard, rough, blackened hands, which made his sister scream; but, to her surprise, it had done the delicate, ingeniously worked scales no harm. The whole thing was, as he said, double, each scale fitting nearly over the other, and as elastic as possible. Kate was charmed with the ungracious gift, and kissed her brother ecstatically for it, receiving a growl in answer; but running down in great delight to tell her mother what Walter had given her.

Mrs. Bulfinch was rather taken aback, but she was so fond of her daughter as to be unwilling to

balk her enjoyment, and to like to ornament her. Nor had she, any more than Walter, any notion as to what the value of the collar might be; indeed, its likeness to cheap jewellery made her somewhat despise it, besides that its light weight made her think it not precious. The Jew paid by weight, and this was the only entire article capable of identification in the collection, except of course the coins; and if this hoard really were, as he hinted, the hidden or thrown-away spoil of a robbery, it was much safer neither to have it in her own house nor to let the Jew be tempted to display it. It really would be safer to let Katie carry it off into "the Shires," where there was no chance of its being suspected or tracked.

However, she observed, "You'll take care about it, Katie—and not wear it about the house."

"I should think not," said Kate, laughing, "but there are times, mother, and parties, when one's mistress does not meddle."

"And don't be too free of showing it, nor telling how you came by it."

"I'm not *that* foolish, mammy dear; I won't bring you and Walter into trouble."

"And, Kate, I do hope you will be a good girl

and keep this situation. So far off, it ain't like having home to go to, close by."

"Yes, mother, I do mean to keep my place this time. You know now it was not my doing that I got the sack. I'm older now, and I know one must put up with things, and I don't mean to stir, come what may, till I have got a year's character."

"There then, dear, I hope you'll keep to your word, for it don't look well to have you always coming back."

No one knew that better than Kate. She was really a sensible girl, with a good deal of right feeling, and a warm heart; but, as often happens with young girls in service, she had had to learn by experience of her own, and she had just come to the age when she was beginning to profit by such experience. Indeed, her two last situations had been with kind careful mistresses who had had a good effect upon her. Affectionate girl as she was, she had a good friend, and of her own age; she had been going to a Bible class, which had done much to revive those better impressions of her Sunday School days which had been almost forgotten.

She was what mistresses call "dressy," with all a young girl's love of pretty things, not always in

good taste, and her temper was apt to resent any check or remonstrance on their part; but she had learnt of late that it was wiser not to give them any occasion of offence, and to reserve her little ornaments for times when she was not under their jurisdiction. Some people would have called this deceitful, or at least sly; but the notion never entered Kate's mind, as she tripped off to the Bridgeworth temperance festival, with her bracelet pushed up under her sleeve till she was out of sight of her mistress, and then pulled down so that the soft pale yellow gleam might delight her between the cuff and the glove.

The tea, the cream, the muffins, the potted sardines, the marmalade are no part of the story, nor are the speeches which moved Katie to her heart's content, nor even her recital of "Exit Tommy," which she gave with a good deal of real power and pathos, making many cry, and raising such a storm of applause as quite frightened her, with a pleasant agitated sort of fright.

Her Bible-class lady met her as she moved from the platform, and said, "Very nicely repeated, Katie; it is a most affecting little piece"—then, after a pause, "Where did you get that bangle, Katie?" she asked, in a disapproving voice.

"My brother gave it to me, ma'am," said Kate, colouring.

"Ah! your soldier brother in India, I suppose?"

Kate let it pass, and found her place among those chairs which were kept foremost for the people who were to sing in the choruses. There she found herself next to Alice Crediton, who was in service at Bridgeworth. Their mothers were cousins, and had been great friends, and the two girls used to meet to go to their classes and to church together. Indeed, it was mainly owing to Alice that Kate had gone to the Bible class or taken the temperance pledge.

Now she caught hold of Kate's hand, exclaiming in a whisper, "My, what a beauty! I never saw the like! How good of Jem to send it!"

Kate remembered her mother's words of warning, and held her tongue.

"And do you know what our Chris has found?" went on Alice; but at that moment came the summons to the platform, and the two girls did not meet again in the crowd all the evening. What our Chris had found must be told in another chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

A KING CUP.

> There are some,
> Of whose plain lives the tongue of fame is dumb,
> Who labour simply in some low estate,
> And neither are, nor dream of being, great.
> W. E. LITTLEWOOD, *The Shepherds.*

THERE was a South Lychford as well as a North Lychford, but the inhabitants of the one did not know much of the other; for the river Awe was wide at all times, and had a great border of marshy land on either side, over which no one had yet ventured to build a bridge. The nearest bridge was more than two miles up the river, and the South Lychford people frequented Bridgeworth for their shopping more than Awmouth, which they could only have reached in a little coughing steam ferry across the estuary.

The southern bank was not so desolate as the northern. It rose a little more, and there had

been some attempt at digging drains, so that the grass was less rushy, though there were very wet patches, and great pools left by the overflowing of the river, with soft quaking ground all round them, and some of the ditches down which the water should have been running had got choked with mud and dead weeds.

Lapwings were there too. They had begun screaming and making as great a commotion as their cousins on the other side, when first they saw a lad coming down among them; but presently they perceived that he was not concerning himself about them, or their eggs, so they attended to their own affairs; only the one whose nest he approached most nearly keeping a watch on him, walking up and down on long slender legs, with an eye cocked back under the long crest.

Chris Crediton would not have objected to carry away a few eggs, but he had no time to look for them. He had been sent down to clear out the choked ditches and drains so that the water might run off into the river—rather a responsible work for a boy of seventeen; but Chris was sensible and trustworthy, and his master, Farmer Hutchins, thought him quite capable.

He worked hard with his big spade, thinking it a pleasant sight to see the stagnant black water wake and stir, the weeds and leaves to move, the thick white bubbles collected into a yellow foam begin to twist round and sail away, and the stream to ripple off in search of the river. He was not quite without an eye for the wagtails, or dish-washers, as he called them, flirting their tails merrily up and down, and for a blue flash of kingfisher now and then, but what he looked most heedfully for was the flowers on the hedges. All the little schoolgirls delighted in carrying their best flowers to Mrs. Fletcher, the Vicar's wife, and it was everybody's great ambition to take her one that she had never seen before. Chris had a turn himself for flowers, and he had great hopes of sending Susan happy to school with some choice treasure to present. It was, however, earlier in the season than choice flowers usually come out, and he had lighted upon nothing more precious than a few double milkmaids (cardamine). Presently, however, in the swamp he saw something strange, half hidden. At first he thought it only some old tin or iron vessel, and hesitated to plunge over his ankles after it; but something strange in the

shape and colour struck him. He made a couple of long strides, sinking in a good deal, and then was surprised at the weight of the thing his hands brought up—a large deep cup of metal, brass probably, for it was eaten up with verdigris, and stuffed full of coins which Chris knew to be old, for he went to the night school, read Lending Library books, and had seen pictures. He also brought up a much tarnished gold cross, with some curious carving and a broken bit of chain; but he could not look long, as his work had to be finished that evening, so he could only put the wonderful collection under his coat, which he had laid in a tuft of rushes, and went on breaking down the masses of refuse that stopped the course of the stream, wondering meantime, whenever his business would allow him, what these things were, and what would become of them.

He had no thought of their belonging to any one but Farmer Hutchins, for he had been bred up to strictly honest ways; but there was no reason against every one at home seeing them first, and enjoying the examination. So, a little later than the regulation time, when the sun was setting, round and red, shorn of his beams by the

blue east-wind mist, he put on his coat, shouldered his spade, took the strange vessel under his arm, and plodded across the marsh, pleased to mark the little streamlets running merrily down their courses, and the ground around them already looking less wet where he had first begun. His home was in the midst of the village, with a hawthorn hedge round it, just getting into bud, and long evergreen streamers of periwinkle on the bank, a few blue blossoms coming up among them. The short path to the house was neat with ashes, and double daisies and spring flowers blossomed beside it, while under the window was a stage of Chris's own making for his myrtle and geraniums, which at present had to look out through the lattice. The door was open, and a whole flock of children rushed out to meet him with "How late you are, Chris!" "Mother is keeping some tea for you!" "Have you any flowers for Mrs. Fletcher?" "What have you got?"

Mother, a pale, worn, but pleasant-looking woman, was putting away the tea-things with her eldest girl to help her. Father, a hard-working carter, who had been out since five in the morning, was half asleep on one side of the fire. Granny,

on the opposite side, held the big baby, which kicked and laughed as Chris came in, answering, "Hadn't finished!" "There, if I didn't forget your flowers!" "But see what I have got!"

They all came round with eager cries, the mother calling out first, "Not on my clean table. It's all of a drip! Bless me, Chris! How could you bring that dirty thing in here? Take it out this moment."

"Mother! I think it is gold and silver," said Chris, standing at the door.

"Gold and silver! It is an old copper tinker's pot. Wherever did you find it?"

"I dug it up out by the long dyke! I saw it sticking out of the ground, and look! I do believe this is a golden cross—"

Here the father roused up. "Gold, did you say? Take it off at once to Mr. Hutchins: he has a right to it, and we haven't got none."

"O daddy!" was the cry, "do let us look at the things."

"Yes, that can't do no harm," said Mrs. Crediton, "and poor Chris must get his tea before he goes out again. Susie, you get the old tarpaulin and spread it, and we will turn out the things. All safe, father! Ain't it, Granny?"

"Don't see no good in it. 'Tis the farmer's," muttered Christopher the elder, subsiding into his chair, but he was not apt to interfere with what his wife and mother chose to do in the house; he was tired out, and did not even take the trouble to grumble at the curiosity of womenfolk, only observing that they must look out that the little ones did not meddle nor take nothing away, but it must be put back just as it was. The cup showed signs of being either gold or something gilt; the cross was certainly gold, so was the broken chain; there was another silver cross, together with some broken fragments richly chased, and some coins.

"Dear, dear," said Granny, "I heard tell when I was a young maid that there were ever so many bones and things got up on that there marsh, long, long agone, when they dug the drains."

"Bones! men's bones?" said Chris, in an awe-struck voice.

"Ay, ay, so they said, but I can't say—! 'Twas long ago, when the wars was."

"The wars! Was it a battle-field?" asked twelve-year-old Susan, in tones of wonder.

"Spoil! like what one reads about," said Chris. "When could it have been?"

"Belike in King Alfred's time," said Susan.

"Come now," called father, "young ones, don't be after talking about kings and stuff. Have you done, Chris? Put the things back, and be off with them."

"Mammy, please mayn't I keep this pretty little dolly?" entreated little three-year-old Amy; but this only brought her quite a hard stroke on her hand.

"Never be after asking for what's none of yourn, you bad child!" old Christopher said roughly.

The little girl stared, at first in amazement at anything so unusual, then burst into a roar, and ran to her mother, who picked her up, and kissed her, and told her daddy only wanted her not to be a naughty girl and ask for what wasn't theirs. She would know better next time. Meantime daddy watched heedfully and uneasily, till all the articles, whatever they might be, were safely restored to the cup, which Granny called a coffee-pot, but about which Chris and Susie had their own opinions, which they discussed, when Susie, by special favour, was allowed to help Chris carry the deep double-handled basket into which mother for more security had put the treasure.

It may be seen that Christopher Crediton the elder was an honest man, though no genius. In fact, every one was somewhat sorry when bright Alice Locock married him from good service. She and her cousin Bessy had been much together in their early days, and still were glad to meet; but Bessy had early married her handsome, flighty, gipsy-looking Bill Bulfinch, while Alice had been engaged to Kit Crediton from her school days upwards, and knew him to be a faithful, good, steady, religious man, and an excellent son, and saw no reason to break with him because he was not clever, nor very strong, and was never likely to rise. Indeed, her love for him had grown up with her, and now after nineteen years it was just as strong as ever, and full also of loyal respect. He had always been kind and patient, and what did it matter if he had very few words, except chirruping now and then to the little ones—never cared to touch a book, and had nearly forgotten how to read? She could always read the Bible and Prayers to him, and find out the places when he went to church, turned out in homely style, but most tidily.

Neither of them being strong, and having a

rheumatic mother on their hands, they had had hard times, and Mrs. Crediton's nest egg of savings had melted away; but they had always kept their heads above water, and the worst of the struggle seemed over, since the eldest girl was out, Chris earned wages all the year round, and Tom when there was a press of work. Moreover, Kit's trustworthy character had made him carter, where, if he often had harder work, he had higher wages, and was valued by his master as never likely to misuse the horses or to do anything on the sly. In fact, he had won respect by character, as cleverness never will win it without trustiness.

However, most of the children took after their mother. Of course they were regular at school, and it would be hard to say whether their father were more proud of their successes, or worried at seeing them reading and talking over their lessons in a way that he declared would spoil them for an honest day's work.

And when Chris wanted to go to the night school, he saw no good in all that. The boy could read his Bible, and write a letter, and all the rest was only gentlefolks' fads. However, when Mrs. Crediton represented that it was much better for

Chris to have this occupation instead of "getting about" in the evening, though he said "he'd give 'un the stick if ever he did," and thought bed or dozing over the fire all that was needful after a day's work, he gave in to parson and wife together, and thus it was that Chris had not forgotten his English history.

CHAPTER VII.

LIGHTS IN THE DARK.

> The knotgrass fettered there the hand
> That once could burst an iron band.
>
> SCOTT, *Lady of the Lake.*

PLEASE, sir, here's the Crediton boy come up with something he has found on the meads, and that he says he must give into your own hands."

"Oh! I hope it's a kingfisher's nest," cried one boy, jumping up from his lesson books.

"Or some young wild ducks," added another.

"I hope not. They will all die," said Mrs. Hutchins, going on with the frock she was embroidering, while Mr. Hutchins yawned, and finished his article in the county paper; but the first boy rushed back. "Papa! he says it is a pot choke-full of gold and silver, and old Kit said he must give it into your own hands!"

"Pot of gold and silver! My stars! Call him in, Bertie; we must see it here."

So Susan, still holding to her handle for very curiosity, followed her brother into the parlour, rather an awful place to her, though Mrs. Hutchins had a still grander room for show, and Susan was quite used to Mrs. Fletcher's drawing-room. But this had a bunch of wax flowers under a shade, and two great silver ploughing cups, besides the glass and cruets on the sideboard, which had struck her with respect.

"Come, let's see, Chris," said the farmer; "what have you picked up?"

"Please, sir, it is very dirty," said Chris, as they signed to him to turn the things out on the green cloth covering the big dining-table. "I dug it out by the long dyke in Black Mead. Mother would have washed it, sir, but father said you should have it just as it was."

"Your father's an honest man, and so are you," responded the farmer, spreading out his newspaper to receive the cup and its contents. "Ha!" tapping the cup, "this is the real thing, and no mistake. It is like a church flagon—brass gilt, I should fancy."

"And there are a couple of crosses," added Chris.

"Old work, old work," said the farmer.

"Here's an image, a little saint, only very roughly made," added his wife. "As if some old church had been robbed."

"Ay, or you know there was that poor old gentleman at the Awmouth hotel was robbed of ever so many antiques. It might be that, thrown away or hidden by the burglars," said Mr. Hutchins. "We must look into it. Coins, eh, Bertie? Too black and muddy to see what they are, even if I were a judge; but I must show them to Mr. Fletcher in the morning. He told me once that the name of the place was from the crosses that were strewn here—Lych, like the Lych-gate, you know. There had been a battle at the river, Danes and Saxons, I think."

"Please, sir, Granny said she'd heard tell of bones being found."

"Well, my boy, here's a shilling for you; you are a good lad! Mary, there, give them a bit of supper. I don't know by just rights who has a claim to these things, and it must be looked into, but you did the proper thing to bring them to me!"

"Quite right," said Mrs. Hutchins, going into the kitchen and directing Mary to set before them a piece of cold veal pie; nor did they live so well at home as to hinder their good appetite for it after their walk of nearly a mile since tea-time.

They tramped home together under the stars, very happy and satisfied, and not minding the dark in each other's company. For, great fellow as Chris was, he did not love to be alone in that long lane after nightfall, though he had no objection to being with his mates in the village; but then there were all the lights from the cottage windows and plenty of noise and fun, so that if it had not been for knowing that mother would wait for him, and be displeased as well as tired out, he would often have lingered after night school or choir practice.

They paused at the gate of the Black Mead, for Susan wanted to have the place where Chris found the hoard pointed out to her; but they both started back, for there was a slender light far away over the marsh, like a very pale candle in a fog.

"Oh dear, Chris! It's something going about!"

"Hush!" and they took hold of each other's hands and ran.

It was not till they were fairly beyond the hedge and could see the parsonage windows that Susan said, in a low voice, "Do you think it is they old folk, because you got at their things?"

"No, nonsense," said Chris, who in a long gasp had recovered breath, senses, and courage. "It's naught but a Jack-o'-lantern, such as comes in damp, lost places."

"But Granny says there are spirits, Chris, though mother don't like her to talk about them, and they might be angry at your hucking about there," said Susan, whose poor cold hand was all trembling.

"Spirits, ay, sure enough, but not that sort," said Chris, now quite his own self again. "I've heard of this Jack-o'-lantern before—ask father if he haven't seen 'em! And I mind me when our standard had to learn those pretty verses about Mirth by a queer long name, one of the tales folk round the hearth told was about

> She was pinched and pulled, she said,
> And he by Friar's Lantern led."

"But he *was* led," said Susie.

"In the tale," said Chris, now very cheerily and oracularly, "and schoolmaster showed us the note

that said it was just a sort of gas out of extra-exhilarations—no, exhalations out of the damp, and if a man was fool enough to run after it, why he would be bogged as sure as life."

"Are you sure?" sighed Susan, a little sorry, now it was over, not to have had the honour of seeing the spirits of the slain. Meanwhile the lamp and big window of the shop were making a brilliant light all across the road.

"As sure as anything!" said Chris; "the farmer gave me this here for myself, and I must take home some baccy to father. He hasn't had none this month, and his pipe do stop him from coughing when he wakes up in these cold mornings."

So in they went to the bright shop that sold almost everything, cheeses and kettles, ready-made boots and shoes, tobacco and groceries; and a variety of barrels, with grease, oil, or butter impeded the way; crockery, pipes elegantly crossed, and smart advertisements adorned the window, and piles of loaves stood up in the corner.

While waiting behind the broad backs of two women and one man, Chris added to his sister, "I'd like to take a cake or a goody to Amy, 'cause father hit her."

"I never knew him hit one of the little ones before, and she's his pet!" said Susan; "poor little maid!"

"She had what wasn't her own," said Chris, fully satisfied of the justice; "she'll remember it. But I'd like that cake with goodies atop for her!"

"Won't you take nothing home for mother?" asked Susan, wistfully.

"I shall take sixpence to her, and she had rather have that," said Chris, all of whose wages went in a lump to mother every Saturday, and did no more than pay for his keep, his clothes, his benefit club, and the like, with threepence a week for night school, and another threepence in his pocket. The boys sometimes jeered him for being kept so short, but his answers were of only two sorts. One sort was: "There are eight of us," and "I know when I've got a good mother." And the other kind was: "What's that to you?" or if it were near the end of the week, "I say, have *you* got as much as threepence?"

Fourpence' worth of tobacco was bought and paid for, and Chris ventured on asking the price of the Bath-bun, when, to his great joy, kind Mrs. Jones told him the lot had grown stale and dry,

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and she could let him have the whole half-dozen for twopence.

So the brother and sister went over their last steps in great glory and content, only regretting that both Amy and father were pretty sure to be gone to bed. However, the church clock struck eight as they passed, and they found father still dozing by the fire, till mother should have finished getting the teething baby off to sleep upstairs, and Amy on his knee, waiting for Susan or mother to undress her; for she rebelled against poor Granny's rheumatic hands, sleepy and cross as she was.

Chris's paper bag was a brilliant consolation. She hugged him, and Susan carried her off with a shriek of joy, a quarter of a bun for present solace and the further promise of making a feast for all the rest (now safe in bed) to-morrow.

"Farmer gave me a shilling, and said he would find out who has the best right to the things," was Chris's explanation, which quite satisfied his father. "'Twas for myself, so I turned in and bought you some baccy."

"Well, Chris boy, you be a good boy to your father." Those were the thanks, and as to mother, who heard the whole story (except the

Will-o'-the-wisp) from Susan upstairs, she too said he was her good lad, and she would have liked for him to keep his sixpence for himself, but then Lucy's boots did want mending dreadfully. With that Chris was able to say his prayers happily that night before lying down by snoring Tom, who was not of the wakeful lively variety of the Crediton family.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN OLD BATTLE-FIELD.

In the last battle,
  Borne down by the flying,
Where mingles war's rattle
  With groans of the dying.

SCOTT, *Marmion.*

CHRIS was helping his father to cut down some hay from the rick when the two Hutchins boys, who were day-boarders at Bridgeworth Modern School, came past. "Hallo, Chris," Bertie called out, "mamma has scrubbed up your things, and they are stunning—all gold, no mistake. I'm to call at the parsonage and ask Mr. Fletcher to come and look at them, and tell Mr. Ripley, too."

Mr. Ripley lived in Bridgeworth, and being agent to Lord Ellerslie, most of the people in the parish paid their rents into his hands. As the boys ran off to start on their two miles' walk, Ber-

tie turned back and said, "Oh! and Chris is not to be far off in case they want him."

"There!" said old Kit, with an odd sort of grin, "you did right, my son. Right's right, whatever comes of it."

However, he was quite as strict as ever over Chris keeping diligently to his work, and called him sharply to order for craning up his neck to look over the hedge of the field where they were spreading manure when he heard Mr. Ripley's dog-cart in the roadway.

"Oh, you think they can't do naught without thee," said he, rather derisively.

"No, I only wanted to know," hesitated Chris.

"Pots don't boil no better for being watched," observed Master Crediton, and Chris could but pick out a load with his fork.

However, before very long little Miss Ruby's slender black legs might be seen climbing up the gate, and her voice called out, "Chris Crediton! Please you are to come in to tell the gentlemen how you found the things, and you are to stay and have dinner, and go down to show where you found them."

Old Kit was half gratified, half disposed to

grumble at the mass of strong brown stuff left for him to spread alone; but he only muttered, "Get back as soon after as you can, as I sha'n't have done to-night, and the weather's like to break."

"All right, father," responded Chris, thinking, however, that hands, boots, and buskins were not in exactly the condition best suited for dining with Mary and Louisa in that very clean place, the farmer's kitchen; though a dinner there was a reward in itself, both as a substantial meal and as leaving all his share of the potatoes, onions, cabbage, and bacon to the rest of the hungry family. He only wished it had been Tom, who was a much more hungry person than himself.

Little Miss Ruby chattered to him all the way home and told him in a voice of meaning, "You know, the fairies sometimes give people pockets full of gold, and if they are not good, it all turns into dead leaves and slate stones."

"That's bad for them, miss," said Chris.

"Yes; but if they are good, it goes on growing and growing. Do you know, Chris, there was a man, and his name was Fortunatus, and whenever he put his hand into his purse and gave to a beggar, there was ever so much more next time."

"That was handy for him. But that's only tales, not true, miss."

"So Bertie and Freddy say. But it is in my book, and Mrs. Fletcher said it was true in a way."

While Chris was thinking how it might be true "in a way," they came to the back door, and Chris was turned by Mary into the back kitchen, so that he might be as little as possible what she and he called "all of a muck" to go into the parlour.

For thither, when he had become as much cleaner as was possible under the circumstances, he was summoned, to find there Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher and Mr. Ripley, besides his master and mistress, and all the articles of his discovery spread out on the table before them, looking much brighter for Mrs. Hutchins' work on them. The gold, indeed, showed for what it was; but the silver was still very black and tarnished, and Mrs. Hutchins was talking of plate powder.

"No, no, Mrs. Hutchins, you had better not take that to it," said Mr. Fletcher. "You might just get off some important mark. We must leave that for experts. Ha, Chris, good morning," as

the lad stood at the open door pulling his forelock. "You have made a great discovery."

"Is that the boy?" said Mr. Ripley. "An honest boy, too."

"He takes after his father," said the farmer. "Here, Chris, up and tell them how you found it."

Chris, shyly but not stupidly, related how he saw a "bit of some'at" standing out of the earth, and pulled at it, found it heavy, took his spade to it, and dug out the large round vessel which stood before them, covered with curious patterns, a good deal of it, especially in the hollows, quite green, but the raised parts pale gold.

"Copper gilt, evidently," said the Vicar.

"And all the rest within it, eh?" asked the agent. "All inside?"

"All inside, yes, sir."

"Yes, it is as I thought," said Mr. Ripley. "When treasure is within anything, as though hidden by design, it is the right of the Lord of the Manor, not the tenant."

"It is as I thought," said Mr. Fletcher. "I never expected otherwise."

"Though I am sure his lordship will only do what is handsome by you and by the finder, too,"

added Mr. Ripley, looking at Chris, who gave another pull of his forelock.

Then they got up to walk down to see the place, all but Mrs. Hutchins. The lady of the Vicarage chose to go too, though they told her how swampy it would be, and the farmer desired Chris to take his spade.

"Please, sir," Chris ventured to say to the clergyman as they set out, "Granny says she has heard tell, when she was a girl, that they used to find bones down there in the marsh."

"Ah! no doubt. The name Lychford witnesses to the slaughter there," said Mr. Fletcher. "You have read about the Danes?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"Well, I have seen a county history at the Cathedral library, in which it appears that the Danes—I think in Ethelbert's time, not the Unready, but Alfred's brother. You remember?"

"Yes, sir, the good one that would not fight till churching was over."

"Quite right, Chris. Well, they plundered and burnt Sebertstone, where you know there's a piece of a ruined monastery. The place where we kept our choir festival."

"Yes, sir," replied Chris.

"The Danes' fleet was in the mouth of the river, and after the pillage of the place, they were making for it, when the Saxons met them here, cut them off from their fleet, burnt it, I believe, and made a great slaughter, whence the two villages got their name of Lychford, that is, Corpseford. I do not know much about such things, but the work on the cup and crosses seemed to me very old English, and one coin, I thought, was of King Egbert."

"Then they would have thrown them away in the fight," said Chris. "But please, sir, there is no ford; 'tis all so squashy and squishy."

"The river is known to have altered its course. You know it is always bringing down mud. It is wider and shallower now than it was when the earliest map of Lord Ellerslie's property was drawn, and the bed was more to the north side than it is now. Mr. Ripley has papers showing there was a lawsuit about it, more than a hundred years ago. Besides, fords were kept in order when there were fewer bridges. So you may imagine all this space below us covered with Danes fleeing or fighting for their lives, and fu-

rious English falling on them, and cutting them down, and the river carrying away the wounded and dead, or some lying about to be swallowed up by the bog."

He spoke to the expression he saw in the lad's thoughtful, wistful eyes, and as he ended, Chris drew a long breath, as if he had been picturing it to himself, and then said, "And it was a thousand years ago."

"A thousand, yes—"

Then Mr. Fletcher was referred to, and Chris had to fall into the rear with a great many thoughts, or rather impressions, on his mind. To have handled, nay, to be the very first to find, the things robbed from a church, thrown away in that terrible onslaught and flight, and hidden ever since in the river slime, gave him a new sense of the reality of the past and a perception that history was not only something written in a book.

His operations of the previous day had rendered walking much less of a succession of splashes, and Mrs. Fletcher, as well as the rest, safely arrived at the tuft of rushes which was a landmark to Chris, and at the hole which he had marked. The gentlemen declared that they were sure Mr. Ripley's

map would show it to be part of the former bed of the river, where probably the ford would have been, and they made Chris try round with his spade, but he found nothing.

"Let it alone for the present," said Mr. Ripley, "till we can hear from his lordship."

"How soon can that be?" asked Mr. Hutchins. "He is going round the world, is he not, after this new fashion?"

"In his steam yacht, yes—last time I heard, I was to address him at Sydney. His answers might come by the beginning of May, but I don't expect he will be at home till towards the end of the summer, when grouse are sure to bring him back."

Chris wondered what grouse were or how they could bring him back.

"Meantime," added Mr. Ripley, "till we know the rights of the case, we must not have all the loafers in the country treasure-seeking here. Will the story have got about, do you think?"

"Well, Mr. Ripley, my boys have had no caution—more's the pity I did not think of it—and they will have gone open-mouthed among their schoolmates; they were immensely excited at the

discovery," said Mr. Hutchins, "and I suppose it is all over the place too by this time, Chris."

"The little ones knew of it, sir," said Chris.

"Then, of course, it can't be helped," said the farmer, "but I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll turn in my cows, as I was thinking of doing before, and give the bull a few runs with them, and if it once gets about that old Jack is there, you may depend none of the loafers will put in an appearance before I lay it down for hay, and I'll get the hedge wired and the gate too in the meantime."

The gentlemen laughed, and Mrs. Fletcher could make no objection, though it argued ill for her botany.

And Chris went away with a good dinner, another shilling from the agent, and an assurance that he would be remembered any way, and moreover with a great many new ideas in his head.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT DID HE GET BY IT?

> Gold thou mayst quickly get; but if it stick
> Unto thy hands, it woundeth to the quick.
>
> G. HERBERT, *The Church Porch.*

THE farmer was quite right. The wonderful story of Chris Crediton's discovery spread through Bridgeworth and both the Lychfords; and the "Awmouth Chronicle" and the "Bridgeworth Weekly Intelligence" were credibly informed that a lad in the service of Mr. Hutchins, etc. Indeed, the editor of the former tried to extract information from the farmer on the next market day, which had the effect of so much alarming Mrs. Hutchins that she declared she could not sleep till the treasure was safe out of her house, and lodged in the Bridgeworth Bank, whither it was accordingly driven by her husband on the next Monday morning.

The report greatly excited both Mrs. Bulfinch and Walter, who were resolved to learn what Chris had found, and what he had done with it.

The two Lychfords were a good deal cut off from each other by the river, for there was no good bridge nearer than Bridgeworth; but there was a watermill a mile off, where the river narrowed, and where there was a perilous-looking plank foot-bridge across the mill-dam, and a punt was also kept. Here, on the Sunday, Mrs. Bulfinch resolved to make her passage, recollecting that it was two years and more since she had seen the face of Alice Crediton, to whom she used to be like a sister.

So as soon as the dinner on sheep's liver was over, she dressed herself in her best black gown, mantle, and bonnet, and proposed to Walter, who was in his broadcloth suit and Kate's crimson tie, to come with her.

"I don't mind if I come up as far as the river," said Walter; "but as to them Creditons on a Sunday, catch me!"

So he lounged along to the river by the side of his mother, getting what diversion he could out of knocking off all the young buds, and throwing

stones at all the birds that came in his way, and by-and-bye he saw a knot of three or four lads together, and wandered off to them, though the mill was in sight, and his mother had begun to entertain a faint hope that he meant to help her to cross the river.

However, the miller's boy happened to be near, and for threepence he put her across in the punt, though he would not promise to be there when she came back, and only laughed rudely at her not liking to cross the narrow plank beside that deep pool.

She put the matter out of her head for the present, and walked on towards the slender spire that rose from among the trees and roofs of houses.

She came up just as the afternoon congregation was coming out, and she presently saw Mrs. Crediton helping lame old Granny, who was bent almost double, and little Amy trotting by her side.

"Bessy Locock! I mean Mrs. Bulfinch! Well, I *am* glad to see you! You are quite a stranger, my dear. You are come to tea."

It was a truly warm welcome, full of the affection of girlhood; but the young folk, Chris and Tom from the choir, and Lucy and Jem from the

school-benches, were not so much charmed. For there was to be a little feast to-day for Lucy's birthday. Tom had been hired at the farm to look after the cows and the old bull, but still more to keep off trespassers. Moreover, Susan had had sixpence for running errands, and, in honour of all this and of Mr. Ripley's shilling, they were to have for tea red herrings, a pot of jam, and buttered cake, as soon as father had come in from his horses. It had been put off to tea-time, that there might be no hurrying off to school, from which Susan had rushed home to look after the fire and the baby.

"And now," as she said sorrowfully as she met her brothers over the pig-sty, "I know how it will be: poor mother will get nothing but the heads and tails and backbones of the little ones."

So she would, only that since that horrid-sounding feast had been put into his head, Chris, to whom a whole herring was allotted in honour of his being a man out at work, managed, while she was pulling out the bones for Amy, to pop half his fish into her plate, with a wink to Susan.

They were not nearly as merry as they had meant to be, for father and the two big boys hardly spoke at all, though Granny, Mrs. Bulfinch, and

the little ones had plenty to say. Mrs. Crediton looked really glad and happy to see her cousin, just when there was something extra to regale her with, but as to talking, the mother was far too busy, first preparing, then pouring out the tea, seeing that no one was choked, dividing the buttered cake, and spreading the jam, for anything to be got out of her.

Besides, though Mrs. Bulfinch considered old Kit as "that steady," by which she meant slow and dull, she was a little bit in awe of him, so that it was not till tea was over, and he had gone out to smoke his pipe over the pig-sty, that she ventured on making the inquiry she had come for, about Chris's discovery.

The hero had betaken himself away from the womenfolk to read what the little ones called "his libery"; that is to say, his book from the Lending Library, "Alfgar the Dane," which Mrs. Fletcher had chosen for him, as illustrating the times of the battle or skirmish of Lychford. Granny and Susan, however, told the story in full detail, Mrs. Crediton now and then putting in a word.

"What did he do with it?" Mrs. Bulfinch asked at last.

"We took it up to Farmer—that's Mr. Hutch-

ins," said Susan, "that same evening, and he was so pleased."

"And what did he give you for it?"

"He gave us both ever so nice a supper of cold pie, and Chris a shilling."

"A shilling! Was that all?"

"The other gentleman, he gave Chris a shilling for taking him about all over the mead."

"Two shillings! Was that all he got out of it?"

"Nobody knows yet who it rightly belongs to," said Mrs. Crediton, pausing in her tidyings; "they say when they find out, Chris may have something handsome."

"I'd never trust to that. The gentlefolks always keep what they can to themselves. To think of such a find and naught but two shillings out of it! I say it is a mortal shame."

"Well, it can't be helped," said Mrs. Crediton; "the things weren't ours, and we have no right to them."

"Who should have a right to them but him as found 'em?"

"I only know that father was in a way till the things were safe out of the house," said Mrs. Crediton, as if that settled the matter.

"There, then, Alice Crediton, I'd never have thought it! Two shillings for Heaven knows how much! I'd never have thought you could have been such a set of fools."

Susan's eyes grew round with horror at such a word to her mother. Jem gave a stamp, and was bursting out with "You sha'n't—" Lucy had a text about such words on the tip of her tongue, and Mrs. Crediton was thankful that neither of her big boys was within hearing. She tried to laugh it off, and said, "That's as one may think, Bess. My master is one of the most particular as ever was."

"Too particular," muttered the visitor.

"We shall see," returned Mrs. Crediton, cheerfully. "Now then, we generally turn out for a walk on a Sunday evening, and if you like, we could go with you to the river, and see how you are to get across."

This was accepted, and the whole family set forth, except Lucy, who preferred staying to look after Granny to going, as she said to the old lady, with that nasty woman, who called mother names and didn't know what the sixth or the eighth commandment taught—matters in which Lucy's Cate-

chism knowledge was at its freshest. In fact, only mother had much of her cousin's company. Father walked on his own way, carrying baby; Chris had Amy on his shoulder; Tom, Susan, and Jem poked in the hedges, and shoved one another about in all good humour, and the two mothers exchanged confidences as far as Mrs. Bulfinch would go, about the doings of their offspring.

At the river, the punt proved to be on the other side, and nobody heard, or seemed to hear, the united shouts of father, Chris, and Tom; so it ended in Chris giving her his hand across the plank, while Jem observed, "Serve her right if he'd give her a start and send her in, coming and eating up our herrings."

Susan giggled, and Tom would have given a horse laugh if father and mother had not been there, and besides, she might have pulled Chris into the pool after her.

She reached the other side safely, waved her handkerchief, and started on her way home, still muttering to herself, "Ever so much gold and silver, and only got two shillings! Two shillings! That comes of marrying such a particular old lout of a chap!"

It did not occur to her to compare—even if she had known it—the amount of real pleasure and happiness that the discovery had already afforded the whole Crediton family with what she and her Walter had got out of theirs.

Walter, however, when he came home that night, could not stop laughing at the notion of the two shillings. He had not done a stroke of work since the find, and another visit to the Jew had paid the rent, bought him a bristly white dog, and provided the Bologna sausage that was produced for supper.

CHAPTER X.

FRIAR'S LANTERN.

I'll follow you, I'll lead you round about,
  Through bog, through bush, through brake, through briar;
Sometimes a horse I'll be, sometimes a hound,
  A hog, a headless boar, sometimes a fire.
SHAKESPEARE, *Midsummer Night's Dream.*

WALTER began to think of the marsh by the river as sown with gold and silver; the thought ran in his head all day, more especially when he had lost while playing marbles with some other idle lads, or when he saw notices of sweepstakes in the sporting newspapers which some of them took in.

Mr. Hunter, however, had workmen about his fields who were instructed not to permit trespassing, and his attention having been called to the plovers' eggs, he had them all collected on his own account till they were no longer saleable. So there was not that excuse.

Walter therefore resolved to make another attempt, by night. There was a bull's-eye lantern which his father had used, and which he trimmed up as well as he could. He was not particularly fond of being out in the dark by himself, but there was a certain spot near an old willow-tree that he had made up his mind was worth trying. There was a young moon, which would give him light as long as he wanted it. So off he set at about eight o'clock, rather against his mother's wish, for she had gone through so much when her husband and sons were out at night that she did not like to see it beginning again. However, this was not either for pheasants or for the "White Stag," and Walter protested that he should not be gone above an hour, he only wanted to try that one hole.

Off he set whistling, but he thought it prudent to stop as he passed the farmhouse, and then he began to feel queer, or, as the Scotch would call it, eerie; for the hedges were high and quite shut out the moonlight, and there were odd rustlings, such as he would never have noticed by day, but which he did not at all like in the darkness.

"Hoo! hoo! hoo! Twichit! twichit! twichit!" It gave him a great start, though he perceived that

it was only from an owl, and shouted an imitation of it, as the great bird sailed past him on noiseless wings. Once his own noise heartened him up a little, but he knew it was not safe to go on whooping and halloing, so he only hummed and whistled to himself, almost under his breath, pausing every now and then to listen to—something. Once it was the very bad cough of a poor sheep; another time the quack, quack, quack of a father mallard leading out his brood of downy ducklings to feed by night; and again the bark of a fox alarmed him lest a dog should be after him.

At last he came to the ramshackle old gate, which had been mended with thorn branches; but he pushed by the corner of the gate-post, and was in the great marsh-field, with the river shimmering in the low moonlight before him. He knew where a tolerably dry path lay, leading towards the willow, and indeed all had dried up a good deal since his first hunt for the pewits' eggs. But how strange everything did look! Was that a man? A frightful figure of a man, or giant, with two stags' horns, ever so many bulls' horns, and a lot of bristles on his overgrown head! Oh no; it was only a pol-

lard willow, which he knew full well by daylight, but it had upset his nerves all the same.

Still, he told himself that he could not come back like a silly without having done anything, and he plodded on right up to the foot of his enemy, and was just going to dig—when, as he set down his lantern, what should he see in the very boggiest part but a pale light, just like a candle in a fog. It was no doubt Jack-o'-lantern, come to lead him into a quagmire.

By day Walter had not the least belief in Jack-o'-lantern, and would have hooted down any one who spoke of him; but it was very different now! Off he set, running as hard as he could go, as he thought, in the way towards the gate, and away from the dreadful light. The ground grew soft under him, and presently he plumped headlong into a cold black pool. He was up again directly, and the water did not come above his knees; but there was no real foothold, and he floundered about in the bitterly cold water for some little time before he could pull himself out by the help of a bunch of rushes and sweet gale on the bank. He had dropped his lantern, and there was nothing to

show him where he was but the pale light which the setting moon had left behind her, and those dreadful horns of the pollard willow standing up against it. He thought he had been on the other side of the willow!

On he moved, getting stiff with cold—for it was a frosty night, and he went cautiously. He heard the church clock at South Lychford begin to strike, and counted nine. It seemed to him that it must be much later! He tried to go forward, but it was as if he were going round and round forever, and nothing would ever bring him further from that horned giant, which grew more frightful in the increasing darkness, or nearer to the hedge —and presently he would get numbed with cold, and not be able to go on any more.

The first hopeful sound he heard was the far-away cough of the sheep. He followed it resolutely straight on, or as straight as he could go, by keeping the same star before him; and at last he came to the hedge, and knew the shapes of the bushes.

By-and-bye he stumbled into his mother's kitchen, a miserable object, dripping, shivering, with chattering teeth, hardly able to say Jack-o'-lan-

tern; and long afterwards he remained firmly persuaded that he had been decoyed by Jack into the swamp, whence he had barely escaped.

Anyway, he was in a wretched plight, and quite worn out, for he had really wandered in his soaked condition for nearly an hour and a half. His mother got him to bed as fast as she could, and gave him a warm drink. She was a good deal alarmed, for such a chill had been the death of his father; and the next morning Walter did wake with a heavy cold and pains in his limbs, but he had youth and sobriety on his side, and was only laid up for a week. Still, he was some time in getting strong, and coughed for full six weeks, during which there was no question of his seeking work; and the better food and the beer that he required led to more than one visit on his mother's part to the old Jew.

And oh! how cross he was to her all the time, never observing how little she ever touched of the meat and drink she provided for him; living only on bread and vegetables, added to the scraps which he turned against, and sometimes the soup from the Rectory, which he chose to despise.

The Curate made him several visits, but Walter

chose to think that this was catching him at an advantage for preaching to him; moreover, he did not want to be cross-examined as to the cause of his illness, so he was sulky and silent in their interview while he could not escape, and, as soon as he was able, always got out of the way when he saw either of the clergy approaching, lest he should be asked whether he was coming to church, or when he would go to work again.

Anyway, he did nothing till haymaking time, and then the chief inducement was the getting into the meadows again.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ARCHÆOLOGISTS.

She saw her brother, Peterkin,
  Roll something large and round,
Which he, beside the rivulet,
  In playing there had found.
He came to ask what he had found,
  That was so large, and smooth, and round.
SOUTHEY, *Battle of Blenheim.*

HAY time had come and gone, and the Black Mead was bare of all but grass stubble, and the banks of its gutters were full of forget-me-not, purple loose-strife, and meadow-sweet, before Chris heard more of his discovery.

Then, indeed, he did hear; for Lord Ellerslie came down to his house in the neighbourhood, and brought over a whole party of gentlemen and ladies to study the subject, one of them being a very wise and learned man, with a great white beard, who knew all about ancient work from the

time of the Romans downwards. He seemed to know the coins as well as if they had been Jubilee florins of Queen Victoria, and explained that some were King Egbert's and some King Ethelwolf's, and one very crooked thing was of an emperor. The two crosses were very old, indeed far more ancient; and he seemed to know these ornaments and the "curly-wurlies" upon the tall vessel that had held them as if they had been a sort of alphabet. He had no doubt that they had once belonged to St. Sebertstone Monastery, and were part of the Danish plunder which had been lost in the flight. So Mrs. Fletcher explained to Chris and to the Hutchins children, who listened with intense interest, while the gentlemen were eagerly discussing the old map of the estate which Mr. Ripley had brought, and comparing it with the great ordnance parish map, lately made out.

This was in the drawing-room at the farmhouse, and immediately afterwards the whole party set out for the mead to trace the former course of the river, and to see the spot where Chris had stumbled on this interesting discovery, more important, as the learned seemed to think, as a testimony to history than for its actual value.

Chris and his spade were summoned to be in attendance, and while Lord Ellerslie, a slim, good-natured, bronzed-looking man in a shabby, weather-beaten old hat and coat, walked with the farmer, Mrs. Fletcher with the antiquary, and the others paired in different ways, one gentleman fell back on Chris, in the rear, and asked him a great many questions about the manner of his discovery, and whether any traditions remained on the subject. Chris luckily knew what traditions meant, and was able to tell what his grandmother had said of bones having been found, and that he had likewise heard that old James Masters was the one who had dug them up, but he was very old indeed, and was in Bridgeworth Union, gone silly.

The old bed of the stream was duly traced out by the map. It was quite dry at present, but the place where Chris's discovery had been made was clearly in the midst of it. He was set to dig all round, while the party sat down, under such shade as a willow-tree afforded, to a picnic lunch; one of the ladies and Chris's friend, however, bringing him a whole packet of delicious sandwiches of beef and cucumber, such as he had never tasted

before, also a bottle of ginger-beer, as he belonged to the Church Temperance Society.

He had plenty of time to finish and to go on digging where he had been told, while he could hear the sound of their merry talk; but he did not find anything, except one bit of bone, and just at last something round and large, which presently, to his dismay at first, and then to his discomfort, turned out to be a skull.

However, as he stood contemplating it, with a strange, half-frightened, half-solemn feeling, some one exclaimed, "The boy has found something!" and then the whole party came hurrying up, and there was as great an acclamation of joy as if he had found a golden crown.

Mr. Fletcher wished to take it at once and bury it in the churchyard; but one of the ladies said, laughing (Chris wondered how she could), "What, when you don't know whether he was a heathen Dane or a Christian!"

"I know he was a fellow-man, who will rise one day," said Mr. Fletcher, almost under his breath, and scarcely any one heard him; for some one else was saying, "Dane or Saxon, that is just what the Professor will tell us."

"Are not Danes and Saxons sufficiently of the same race to have similar skulls?" asked Lord Ellerslie.

The Professor said something far past Chris's understanding, and his daughter, the laughing lady, still untamed, said, "Shall we look on your church door, Mr. Fletcher?"

"I am thankful to say that my church door is Perpendicular," replied he.

This sounded even more mysterious; but the good-natured gentleman, whose name it appeared was Milbank, explained to Chris that there was found in Essex the strong door of a very ancient church, with a skin nailed out upon it, and it had been made out by doctors and microscopes that it was a human skin once belonging to a red-haired man. Some miserable Dane must have been flayed by his victors, alive or dead, and the skin nailed up as a savage trophy. South Lychford Church must have been built much too late for such a horrid relic, as the architecture was of the fourteenth or fifteenth century.

Mr. Fletcher was not allowed to fulfil his reverent wish, for the Professor carried off the skull to consult some of the people at the British Museum,

156383B

who were more learned in human bones than himself.

They all set off to see the church, having first presented Chris with the remains of their luncheon, quite enough to regale the whole family at home for at least two days. Also Lord Ellerslie actually put half-a-sovereign into his hand for his day's work, and told him that he would consult with the Vicar about him, and meantime he was to bring Mr. Hutchins whatever he found.

Chris, standing dumfounded both with the present gift and future promise, heard the shrill voice of the lady say, "Aren't we going to pick the brains of the old Granny?"

It certainly sounded rather shocking, especially coming on the skull discussion, and Chris, as he went on digging, according to the farmer's orders, could perceive that Mrs. Fletcher was recommending that the poor old body should not be frightened or distressed by the whole party rushing in upon her, or she would forget everything of the little she knew.

In fact, Mrs. Fletcher had tried to stir up her memory before, and knew that it was of no use.

She had never been a clever woman, and "Bless you, ma'am, folk didn't make no work over such-like when I was a girl" was all she had to say. She could not tell who had dug up the bones, nor where, nor what had become of them—most like burnt for lime—and as to when it happened, "the wars" were all the same to her, whether Crimean, French, or Danish, or even Israelite—everything past was all one to her.

The Professor's daughter, whom she pronounced a "flighty sort of inquisitive kind of lady," gave her a shilling "to buy snuff," and this, as she did not belong to a snuff-taking race, offended her deeply, though she was too well bred not to curtsey thanks.

"She thought me no better than a tinker woman," she declared, with great disgust, to her daughter-in-law, who had been out shopping at the time of the call, or they might have got on a little better.

Mrs. Crediton had been rather startled. She had met Mr. Fletcher with the "gentleman," Mr. Milbank, and they had stopped and spoken to her. "This is his mother," she heard the Vicar saying.

Then he added, "Good morning, Mrs. Crediton. Mr. Milbank was very much pleased with your boy Chris this morning."

"I am glad to hear it, sir. He is a very good boy, I will say."

"And remarkably intelligent," put in Mr. Milbank.

"He always was fond of his books, sir," and a flush of pleasure came into her cheeks.

"Have you thought of getting a situation for him?" asked Mr. Milbank.

"No, sir. He has always worked with the farmer, and he gets man's wages nearly."

"He seems to me too clever and intelligent for farm work," said Mr. Milbank.

"It is what he and his father have always been accustomed to, sir," answered Mrs. Crediton, feeling it a sort of reflection on her husband and on the farm work, which is by no means to be despised.

"Well, think about it. Perhaps you will hear from me again."

Mrs. Crediton went home, but said nothing about this suggestion, partly because she believed nothing would come of it, and did not want to put

things into Chris's head, and make her husband uncomfortable, partly because the whole household was excited over the young lady's questionings and over the destination of Chris's half-sovereign.

The visitors had not by any means done with their quest. They routed up the poor old gaffer in the Union Workhouse, but they found it was quite true that he was "gone silly," for he could do nothing but shake his palsied head, and say "Ay, ay," to whatever they asked.

Then they tried the other side of the river, and began with Mrs. Bulfinch, asking if she had ever heard of remains being found in the marshes; but Walter had a day or two before carried off the last of the coins, and she thought it prudent to say, "No, never that I heard tell of. There might have been bones long ago, but I never heard of nothing else."

Then they tried for themselves in the field, but Farmer Hunter came out on them, not at all civilly, and warned off trespassers.

"I wasn't going," as he said to his friends at market, "to have a lot of idle gentry trapesing about and hooking and hucking all over the place. Why, my wife's uncle had the bad luck to have

a dirty old bit of Roman pavement, as they called it, on his farm, and there was no more peace for gentlefolks coming and going and chattering over it, till they ruined one crop of clover, and then he dug some of it up and carted it away, and filled up the rest so as no one could get at it."

The land was Mr. Hunter's own, and he could do as he pleased.

So the curious betook themselves to the shops in Awmouth and Bridgeworth to see whether anything could be picked up by chance.

CHAPTER XII.

OLD AND NEW.

> Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
> Their homely joys, and destiny obscure.
>
> GRAY, *Elegy.*

MORE was heard of Mr. Milbank. Mr. Fletcher came to Mrs. Crediton with an offer from him to take Christopher into his garden, to be under his head-gardener, to have board and lodging and ten shillings a week to begin with.

"I should not think of proposing it," said Mr. Fletcher, "if Mr. Milbank were not one of my oldest friends, a thoroughly excellent man, very careful of his servants, indoor and out, and he assures me that his head-gardener is a very good man, who has been with him from a boy, and has a kind, right-minded wife, who would be very careful of your boy."

"Yes, sir, no doubt," said Mrs. Crediton, in a

tone as if she did not like it at all. "Where is it, sir?"

"It is near Balminster, about two hours from here by the railroad—fifty miles."

"Then I could not see to his washing and mending, sir?"

"No, I am afraid not; but he could easily come home and see you when he had a holiday. And another thing, Mrs. Crediton, Lord Ellerslie wishes to give £5 to be laid out to the best advantage for the boy, so that his outfit would be provided for."

"It is very good of his lordship; thank you, sir," said Mrs. Crediton, still reluctantly. "I must see what his father says."

"Of course you must. Tell him to come and talk to me about it, and you may tell him, too, that I would not think of advising you to accept the offer if I did not know both Mr. Milbank and his gardener, and think besides that a lad like Chris would be more out of the way of temptation in a place like Mr. Milbank's garden, as he has such a turn for flowers especially, than keeping on with farm work. Lads need something to occupy their minds."

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"MY SON, YOU WANT TO BE A FINE GENTLEMAN!"

Page 107.

All this was a very new light to Mrs. Crediton, and she had all a mother's reluctance to parting with her son, as well as a certain undefined dislike to the notion that what was good enough for her husband was not good enough for his son; but she was a thinking woman, and wanted time to turn over the scheme, so she only curtsied and said she was much obliged, and Mr. Fletcher went away.

When she spoke of it in the evening Chris's eyes began to sparkle. He had been very much taken with Mr. Milbank, and besides, the being in a garden and learning all about plants and flowers seemed to him delightful.

"Umph!" said his father. "Rum sort of business—fit for the nesh folk. Not a man's hard day's work in it all."

"Oh yes, there is, father; plenty of digging and lifting and hard work," said Chris. "And then one would get to know all about the trees, and the flowers, and all the rest. I'd like very well to go."

"I sees," said old Kit. "My son, you want to be a fine gentleman with all your crackjaw Latin names and woman's fiddling work, and look down

on a poor old plain labourer like your father! That's the way with all you young lads!"

"No, no, daddy, I'd never look down on you," said Chris. "Don't you never think that; but I should like to get on, to know more, and do what one could put one's head into like."

Neither Chris nor his father quite knew how much really intellectual intelligence was needed for agriculture, and there was a good deal of truth in Kit's next murmur: "That's the way of it! All you sharp lads with a bit of schooling think yourselves as wise as judges, and can't nohow be content to stick to honest work, so you all go off one way or the other, and leave naught at home but the idle scamps."

"Indeed, I'd never be idle. I'd send home ever so much of my wages," entreated Chris.

"Much of that, with all the new-fangled whimsies, you'd be up to. If you goes, you goes, and there's an end of it."

Somehow, this narrow way of looking at the matter had done much to set Mrs. Crediton on the other side of the question, and besides, she saw her son's eagerness, and she ventured to say,

"There's something in it, after all, father. These young chaps do want to get out and see the world, and if they are balked, ten to one they get into mischief."

She let him observe that it was not so in his time, and that it all came of schooling, but she put him in mind of lads who had gone to the bad, become navvies or run away to sea, and then remarked that, if all their boys stayed at home, there would not be work enough for them on the farms; and indeed it was hard enough to find regular employment for Tom to make this a telling argument.

"Mother's for it, so the lad will have his way," was the most he could say, and in a sort of dogged resigned tone not at all comfortable to his wife or son.

"I wish you'd let me go with your good-will, father," said Chris.

"Let you go! you'll go anyway," said the elder man, "like all the rest of 'em."

"Not without your leave, father," said Chris, with a great gulp at the assurance; "but if you knew how sick and tired I do get of nothing but

the old plough lands, and meads, and the mud and the stubble, and plodding after the steady old horses that never go out of a foot's pace."

"There it is! That's schooling," grumbled his father. "Bless you, why I began bird-starving in Cuckoo Close when I was not as high as Jem, and Mr. Hutchins' father was the farmer, and I've gone on this fifty year, and I knows every field in the farm and what the crops have been and should be, and what dressing it wants. There now, I loves it all nigh as much as if 'twere mine own son, and what should a man need to look further?"

Chris could not help giving a disconsolate sigh, almost a moan, for fifty years in the same furrows seemed an oppression on his soul; yet he still, with the pertinacity of youth, persisted, "Won't you come up to the Vicarage and see what Mr. Fletcher has to say?"

"What should I do that for? You'll have your way, whether or no."

"Your father's tired; don't be at him any more to-night," his mother managed to say. "He will come round, only don't you vex him now."

For she knew that part of this growling came from the suddenness of the proposal, and another

part from reluctance to get up and tidy himself for a visit to the Vicarage; and every word of the conversation had convinced her that the offered service was the safest opening for her boy, since it was quite vain to hope that the unbroken round of toil among the clods would satisfy his energy and aspirations.

Indeed, those words which had cost Chris so much, that he would not go without his father's consent, had done much to change the father's feeling, though no more was said that night.

The boy's prayers were of the youthful, one-sided kind, that his father might give way and he might go and do his duty in this new sphere. The mother's were those of the more chastened Christian, that her son might do his duty, and have "what was most expedient for him." The father's? Who shall say what his earnest, but half-formed, inarticulate prayers were? At any rate, each said, "Thy will be done," though the boy especially had hard work to get himself to say it with his spirit.

His mother told him not to "worrit" his father, for it would all come right, and he had learnt by experience that such was generally the result;

moreover, his work the next day was in a different direction from his father's, who was carrying a load of hay to Awmouth with Tom in attendance.

Tom whistled, but they spoke little all day, and the end of it was that when Kit came home after foddering his horses, the first thing he said was, "Well, the birds! they do fly off from their nestes." And, after a pause, "I'll not be the one to stand in the lad's light."

He cleaned himself of his own accord, and went up, without being persuaded, to the Vicarage, and came back convinced that it was to be, and that they were good folks, who would do their best to keep Chris a good boy. So he might go out, since nothing else would serve him, with his father's blessing and good-will.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NORTH LYCH TREASURE.

> Thefts, like ivy on a ruin,
> Make the rifts they seem to shade.
> C. GAVAN DUFFY, *A Lay Sermon.*

SINCE it had been discovered that the river Awe was a burier of treasure the curious were not inclined to leave the subject alone. The Black Mead of South Lychford was pretty well explored, and the marsh of North Lychford was being drained by Mr. Hunter, more for the purpose of keeping guard over it than with the hope of discovery.

But still the collectors of curiosities prowled about in the shops in the two towns, and by-and-bye they fell on Isaacs, the Jew, who had not been proof against such a demand, but kept in his tray the last instalment of Walter Bulfinch's coins. Here were the King Egberts like some of those

found by young Crediton! Of course there were immediately close inquiries as to where they came from, and the Jew ended a cross-examination by stating that he got them from a woman and her son who had found them in a bog at Lychford. North Lychford, it appeared, on further pressure; but the names did not come out, for Isaacs always took care not to know the names of his clients.

There was a questioning and a talk at South Lychford, and then, in the way of gossip, it came out that Wat Bulfinch had been, as people said, "wonderful flush of tin" all the spring and summer, though he had been ill and out of work, and one of his marble-playing mates even deposed that he had treated them all at the "White Stag," and as he paid, had declared that he could get plenty more where that came from. Nay, the plough-boy, who had warned him off from the marsh-field, had something to say about his haunting it, and one woman recollected seeing him going that way with a bull's-eye lantern in his hand just before he was ill.

All this worked up from tongue to tongue into a pretty story, and at last it came to the foreman's ears, and from him to the farmer in this shape.

"That there Widow Bulfinch and her son—good-for-nothings all of 'em were, like their father—had been digging up a sight of gold and silver and jools [jewels] in the marsh on the sly, and selling them all to Isaacs the old Jew in Awmouth, and a pretty good thing they had made of it."

So down came Farmer Hunter all rage and anger upon Mrs. Bulfinch, swearing at her so that it made her very flesh creep, and threatening her with all his might for an ungrateful hussy robbing him of his property.

Then, as she stood trembling, and crying, and protesting that she had never robbed nobody, and no one could say she ever had wronged no one of a penny, he came down on her with the story.

Now, when one is accused of far more than the truth, it is much easier to deny the whole mass than if the one real grain of fact is brought forward alone, and Mrs. Bulfinch could with great vehemence declare that the whole came of her neighbours' wicked malice, and falsehoods, and jealousy. She denied that anything at all had been found in the marsh by herself or her son, and when asked how such an idle, lounging fellow as he came to have a brand-new coat, a dog, and a

handful of money, she shed more tears, and declared it was very hard—new coat indeed! when his sister's master had let her bring the poor boy an ulster—not new—oh no, not at all. So one truth was again made to cover a falsehood. And as to the money—her Jem out in India might send his brother home a present.

So voluble and so tearful was she that the farmer fairly got confused, though it was firmly fixed in his own mind that she was telling falsehoods, and he went off declaring that he should go to a magistrate, and get a policeman to search the house and examine her son.

He actually did go to Awmouth, but he went first to his own solicitor to ask how he should take the law of that woman and her son, who had been robbing him of "such a hoard of gold as they had made such a work of at South Lychford."

The lawyer heard all that Mr. Hunter had to tell, but when it turned out that the farmer had no notion what had been taken, nor whence, nor when it had happened, and did not know how to find out, the legal mind at once decided that it was of no use to take any measures, since there really was no definite charge to bring against

either Walter Bulfinch or his mother, and all that could be done was to agree with the farmer that it was an abominable shame that such a scamp should get off freely, when it was morally clear that he deserved hanging, said Mr. Hunter; but the solicitor gave a slight whistle.

If Mrs. Bulfinch could only have heard that conversation, she would have been much easier in her mind; but Walter, who had not been far off, found her crying over folding her linen and declaring that she was all of a tremble, the farmer had given her such a turn, and he was going to bring down the police on them, and have the house searched.

Walter did not know much more about the law than his mother. He knew that none of the hoard in the marsh-field remained, but he also knew that he had got his father's old gun set to rights, and had a ferret in the wood-house, and he fully believed also that he could be called to account for the treasure, for he had no notion how much the Jew had betrayed, and he had no idea what could be done to him. He sat brooding till dinner-time.

Mrs. Bulfinch's work had to go on all the same,

and when dinner was over, she put her linen into the flasket; but Walter did not seem to hear her when she asked him to help her carry it, and she took it by both hands, as she had often done before.

She took it to its home, was paid, bought some sprats for Walter's tea, and came home with a heavy, anxious heart, hoping at least to put him in good humour with the little fish.

No Walter was within to open the door, but the key was in the hole where it was always put when they both went out. So she was not surprised, but she fed the pig, put the kettle on, and made the sprats ready to dress as soon as he came home.

Time went on, and still he did not come. She waited, and took her tea alone, thinking him out with his mates, more especially as she found that the ferret's box was empty. No doubt they had gone on some rabbiting expedition on the sly, and if the police did come, it was as well that the ferret should be out of the way. For her part, she was glad not to have to see to the beast, for she hated the creature, and was afraid of it. One, in

her husband's time, had bitten her badly, when she was taking away Jem from teasing it.

She wearied over the darning of his socks, and still he did not come. At last, she left out the key and went to bed, as she had sometimes had to do before, but still she did not hear him come in. In the morning light, she tried to believe he had come in while she slept, but when she looked at his bed, it was empty. Ah! his best clothes and the ulster were gone!

Then she looked for the little bag in the corner of the drawer where she kept her rent money. That too was gone! The drawer had a lock, but it was one that could be opened by a contrivance with a knife, and Walter knew it!

Poor woman! it was all too plain—Walter had fled. Her last son! He had fled and robbed her!

She sat stunned for a little while, then the only thing she could think of was to see whether his chief mate, George Burnside, had come in, for there was that one hope that the boys might have stayed out together. She walked down with trembling haste to the Burnsides' cottage.

No; George had come home in good time, and was out at work in the Lower Croft. Mrs. Bulfinch could not rest, got away from questions, and tramped after George, who, by-the-bye, was the informer about the lot of gold.

However, he *had* seen Wat, who had brought down the ferret yesterday and asked him to buy it, but he wouldn't, for mother would never abide the creature, and advised its being taken to the place at Awmouth were they had such things.

"He had his bundle," said George, "and set off on Awmouth road. It's my belief," and he looked up impertinently at her face, "that he has gone and cut along of this row about the gold and silver in Old Hunks's fields."

Poor Mrs. Bulfinch! The only relief to her mind was a torrent of abuse to George Burnside for a bad lad who had led her poor innocent boy astray, and wanted to take away his character; but he grinned and went on with his work.

She walked on to Awmouth in vain hopes of finding him; but all she could gather from any one was that a couple of lads had been hired in haste to make up the crew of a little trading

steamer from America just leaving the harbour, and one *might* be her son.

She had to believe it, for she heard no more, till after three weary months an envelope came with a strange stamp, and a short letter, for Walter was no scholar.

It said that he was well, liked the sea, and meant to go on as he was, and Old Hunks could not get at him, and he could see a bit of the world. She must not take on, for some day he would bring her home a pocketful of dollars, and so he remained her dutiful son!

So the hidden treasures caused two separations; but how unlike!

CHAPTER XIV.

NEW HOMES.

> The daughters of the year,
> One after one, thro' that still garden passed,
> Each garlanded with her peculiar flower,
> Danced into light and died into the shade.
>
> TENNYSON, *The Gardener's Daughter.*

AFTER all, the tears over the separation at South Lychford were chiefly shed by Granny and Chris himself. The old woman sobbed under her apron that she should never see him again, and Chris, when it came to the parting, really howled over it, while his father told him to be a man and not a porker with his nose rung.

It would take too long to tell every event that happened to Chris in Mr. Milbank's service. Park Court was about three miles from the town of Balminster. It was a grand place, with beautiful gardens, and the head-gardener, Mr. Dewhurst,

and his wife, lived in a pretty cottage in the grounds. They were elderly people whose married daughter had emigrated to Canada, leaving them a little grandchild to be their delight. Chris was to have his meals with their little maid, and to sleep in a small room connected with the hothouses.

Poor boy! this was his misery. He could never recollect the time when he and Tom had not lain in the same bed, and though it was only in a queer little lean-to, where of late he had hardly been able to stand upright, the rest of the family were close at hand; and here he was, not merely in a room by himself, but in a house by himself, with no beds near him but beds of asparagus and cabbages, three of them between him and Mr. Dewhurst's house.

Only those who have felt the like can guess what the poor lad underwent every night between nine and ten, or sometimes even eleven, for he could hear the long beats of the great clock at the stables. The room was as nice as could be, with a comfortable iron bedstead, clean and tidy, furniture that would have been a luxury at home, a pretty paper, and even a picture of the Wise

Men offering gifts; but he would have given all to feel Tom, or hear his father snore, or even the baby crying and mother crooning over it. What he feared, no one could tell; sometimes it was imaginary thieves after the grapes, but more often it was some kind of indefinite horror, and coupled with this a deadly fit of longing and mother-sickness, which made him think seriously of throwing up his place, coming home to South Lychford furrows, and living in comfort in the crowded house. They would all think him very foolish, and he could hear already the sort of coughing, mocking snarl with which his father would receive the tidings; but what would that matter in comparison with his present wretchedness? He began to compose his letter, and that usually helped him to a sound sleep.

In the morning things were different. The garden and the houses were a delight for beauty and variety, even though at first he was set to the roughest work, sweeping and weeding, and the leaves really seemed to come down on purpose to make him have all his work to do over again. Mr. Dewhurst, too, was at first very sharp to him. In fact, that personage had observed that he never

knew a lad come with a special character for out-of-the-way honesty who was not the worst thief of all. However, he relaxed when he had observed that Christopher always gathered faithfully, never even helped himself to a fallen apple or pear, and confessed with great trepidation and distress when he pulled up a flower root by mistake, or broke a pane of glass.

The little granddaughter made friends with "Kis," as she chose to call him, and so did cats and dogs. Then Chris felt himself learning in spite of the leaf-sweeping, and when he was found to be clean-handed towards books, he was allowed to read the gardener's magazines, and these were a real pleasure. By day that weary longing for home went off; it seemed too foolish to mention when he wrote his letters, and after he had coaxed the new puppy to come and sleep in his room, he was happier, and felt he had company. Better still was the hearing little Mabel one Sunday evening saying her Psalm (the 121st) to her grandmother, and coming to the verses, "Behold He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord Himself is thy keeper, the Lord is thy defence upon thy right hand."

"Yes," said Mrs. Dewhurst, "I remember how I used to say that at night when I had fancies and frights, I liked it so when they used to sing it at church.

Then thou, my soul, in safety rest,
  Thy Guardian will not sleep,
His watchful care that Israel guards,
  Shall Israel's monarch keep.

Sheltered beneath the Almighty's wings
  Thou shalt securely rest,
Where neither sun nor moon shall thee
  By day or night molest.

At home, abroad, in peace, in war,
  Thy God shall thee defend,
Conduct thee through life's pilgrimage,
  Safe to thy journey's end."

Chris made up his mind to learn that 121st Psalm, a verse every night, and say it over to himself; and it was wonderful what a difference it made to him. By Christmas, though the nights were at their longest and darkest, he had almost forgotten that he had ever felt such alarms, and when he went home for a couple of days, and laid a quarter's rent on his mother's table, he was glad that he had won the victory.

Mr. and Mrs. Milbank, when at home, were kind, talked to him, and lent him books, and he

took advantage of the various schemes for improvement prevailing in the village; but his real turn was for gardening and for botany, as going to the bottom of the matter. Mr. Dewhurst soon found this out, and enjoyed training him and trusting him more and more, and the great pleasure he felt in his work and pursuits made the temptations around fall short of him.

So it went on for three happy years, and then Mrs. Milbank died, away in London, and there was a great break-up; for her husband could not bear to come and live at Park Court, and he let the place to people who brought their own establishment.

Mr. and Mrs. Dewhurst, who had saved a good deal of money, decided upon going out to their daughter in Canada, taking her little girl, of course, and perhaps settling there. Chris was by this time a very fairly skilful gardener, who could well undertake a small place; but Mr. Dewhurst strongly advised him to get a situation in a good nursery garden, where he could, while growing somewhat older than his present score of years, gain experience in the management of grapes and of orchids, and qualify himself for a really superior

head-gardenership. For the present, he would be rather less well off, as, though the payment would be doubled, he would have to find his own board and lodging; but when Chris thought of the future, he saw that it was well worth while to prepare for the time when his father would have to give up work. Besides, he so loved his profession that he longed to go on to its higher stages.

There was a beautiful nursery garden at Balminster, with huge beds of exquisite roses, masses of calceolarias, trees of chrysanthemums, dazzling sheets of lobelias, and perfect groves of rhododendrons of all shades, a sort of paradise to Chris whenever he was sent there, so that he scarcely knew how to come away, and the head of it was well known to Mr. Dewhurst, and quite willing to accept his recommendation.

So, in due time, Chris sorrowfully said good-bye to the friends he had won at Park Court, and was soon established in comfortable lodgings with a respectable widow at Balminster, who undertook the care of his linen, and satisfied Mrs. Dewhurst, who had cared enough for him to come and arrange for him.

There was a beautiful church, and Chris, whose

voice had come back, hoped to be in the choir. His master sent out men to attend to the gardens in the town, and the Rectory was under his charge. He desired "Crediton," as Chris was now called, to go and see to the little conservatory there, and while Chris was waiting for the lady's orders, a maid, very pretty, dark-eyed, and neat-looking, came down with a message, and she had no sooner spoken than the familiar Lychford voice rang on the young man's ears, and almost at the same moment one exclaimed, "'Tis Kate Bulfinch!" and the other, "'Tis Chris Crediton!"

Just then the master came in, and they both knew their manners too well to take any more notice of each other, nor did they meet again all the rest of that forenoon.

CHAPTER XV.

A FINCH TRANSFORMED.

Black were her eyes, as the berry that grows on the thorn by the wayside.—LONGFELLOW, *Evangeline.*

YES, it was Kate Bulfinch! On the Sunday, the very next day, as Chris came out of church, he saw her in the gaslight, with another young woman, evidently a fellow-servant. As he turned towards her, she sprang forward, saying eagerly, "I do so want to speak to you. Jane, this is my cousin, Mr. Crediton; Chris, she is my friend, Miss Jane Morley. O Chris! I do want to know whether you have heard anything of my poor mother?"

"Your mother! no," said Chris, surprised.

"I've written—oh, ever so many times!—to her and to Walter, and never had an answer since the first; and the last to Wat came back with 'Not known here' on it."

"I did hear," said Chris, considering, "something about Wat having gone to sea."

"To sea! Poor mother! But when did you hear? When were you last at home?"

"About six weeks ago, just before I came here. I went home to my poor old Granny's funeral," said Chris, who had a piece of crape on his arm, "but I think it was before that."

"I haven't been home for these three years," said Kate. "I wrote when I left my last situation and offered to come and see them, but I did not get an answer, and didn't know what to think. Walter gone to sea! Well, mother is no scholar, but I thought she might have made shift to write. Poor mother!" and she was crying.

"I'll write again, and ask if mother knows aught," said Chris, "and let you know when I come to do the conservatory again."

"Oh! thank you, dear Chris! I do want to hear about Alice too, and all of them—only how to do it? We don't have Sundays out. It's not respectable, unless we have our families to go to."

"Tell your missus, all square," said Chris.

"She is a kind lady—but"—as they had reached the back door, and Jane had gone on to ring the

bell—" if you ask for me, Chris, call me Miss Finch. I leave out the Bul-, because the others did tease me so."

" Mayhap that is why you don't get your letters," he said.

" Oh no, can't be. I told her in my letter."

" Truth's best," said Chris, and as the door opened, they shook hands, and he sped away, fearing that he heard Kate beginning to sob.

They both felt as two Englishmen might do meeting in the deserts of Africa; those home tones that had come through their mothers were so refreshing; and as far as Chris could see, Kate looked exceedingly nice, quiet, and respectable, as became a Rectory servant.

In very truth, Kate was much altered for the better. She had always been an eager, easily impressed girl, and the real good she had taken in during her last years at school had only been stifled for a time by the giddiness of her girlhood in situations which did nothing to keep up those higher thoughts which unfortunately had never been fostered at home.

However, at last she had fallen upon really good people, and her better impressions were renewed

with the vehemence of her nature. She had fallen into excellent hands for her preparation for Confirmation. She had felt and laid to heart every word that was said, had cried bitterly over her faults, and made excellent resolutions, to which she had kept with all her might. She did fail sometimes, often because she had not been bred up to a high standard, nor to notice lesser failures; but she always grieved over them, and the delight she took in hymns, in stirring sermons, and in any kind of exciting or touching service, was extreme. But all the time she was a thoroughly honest, good, upright girl, trying to do her best, and, as she had her mother's industry and aptitude for work, she was a valuable servant. That alteration of her name had been made when she left Bridgeworth, and that there was any falsehood in it had never occurred to one who had used many worse deceits, and thought nothing of them, though she had repented of as many as she could recollect. She had been transferred from that first situation to Lady Clara Melton's at the Rectory, where she was very happy, except when she thought of her home and her mother, and the unanswered letters.

The sight of Chris Crediton, and especially his

voice, had roused her feelings so much that she worked herself up into a violent fit of crying, and was quite red-eyed when she went into prayers that night, and her shoulders shook a little.

Lady Clara, knowing that she was a person easily affected, asked the other maid Jane whether she were in trouble.

"It is thinking about her mother, my lady," was the answer. "That young man as was doing the plants is her cousin, and she met him—quite promiscuous, my lady—after church, and that quite upset her."

"Did he tell her bad news?"

"No, I think not, my lady; it was rather that there was no news at all."

On this, Lady Clara spoke to Kate herself, hoping she had not heard anything to grieve her. There was another gush of tears. "No, my lady, but I have writ again and again and can't get no answer, and my last letter came back to me; and young Crediton, that's my mother's first cousin's son, he said he would write to his mother and find out, and he did seem so like home—so natural—my lady," and she began to weep still more.

"No doubt—no doubt you must have felt it,"

said Lady Clara. "I hope he is a steady young man."

"Oh yes, my lady, the Creditons are a real good respectable family as ever lived, and he works for Mr. Todd's nursery; and if I might speak to him when he comes, and hear what he learns, my lady, for he wouldn't do anything unbeknown to you?"

Lady Clara, of course, gave permission, and her husband further asked Mr. Todd about his new workman, and heard of his having come with an excellent character from the head-gardener at Park Court. Moreover, the new face had been observed in the congregation. So Chris became known to the clergy, and, as his voice had returned, was put into training for the choir when there should be a vacancy, and meantime was in request for lending aid in singing at the mission-room services. Of course Kate's tears were quite real and genuine, but she was pleased with her own sensitiveness for having shed them, and felt as if she had been like Nehemiah.

Lucy was the chief scribe at home since Susan had gone out; for though Mrs. Crediton was a better scholar than her cousin, she felt writing a

trouble, and preferred sending messages by the readier pen. There was not much to tell Kate. Mrs. Crediton had not seen her cousin for a long time, but she would have heard if anything had happened to her. It was true that Walter Bulfinch had gone to sea—Tom had heard as much from one of his mates. Farmer Hunter had died suddenly at market, and the place had been sold to a company which meant to make tiles and crocks, so perhaps Mrs. Bulfinch might have had to move. As soon as the days were longer, mother would try to get over and see after her.

This cheered Kate a good deal, especially as she heard it by day, in the midst of her work, when she was enjoying five minutes among the begonias and chrysanthemums with Chris. As to going to see her mother, it was better to wait to hear where she was before asking for permission, and it certainly was unsafe to send any money, since the last order had never been acknowledged.

Every time Chris came to the Rectory garden Kate contrived to have a few minutes with him, though not more, for if she showed herself in the least inclined to linger, he went on with his work. She generally also managed to walk home from

church with him, and say how beautiful the music was, and how lovely the sermon.

Kate was a very pretty girl, with the gipsy complexion of her father, refined and softened down, and every one of the youths who came to the Rectory admired her, and several showed that they would most gladly have been on "walking" terms with her. Indeed, she had been much inclined to favour the best tenor, or else the butcher's young man; but after Chris Crediton appeared, she had eyes for no one else, and her whole thought on going out of church in twilight morn, bright noon, or gaslit evening was whether she would fall in his way without unseemly lingering, appearing to pursue him, or getting laughed at by her fellow-servants; and when he once brought her a bit of heliotrope and geranium, she pressed it in her Bible, and thought it her greatest treasure.

And Chris! He knew she was pleasant, and she put him in mind of home; he liked to exchange greetings with her, and it was rather flattering to be laughed at by his mates on the liking of such a pretty girl; but it was all much in the same way as he played with little Mabel Dewhurst. His time was not come, and, to tell the truth, he

was far more in love with the new double begonia, which was to be called by the horrid name of Toddiana, than with any other creature in existence, except his mother and sisters. Lucy had been kept at home because when out of school she was very useful in her grandmother's decline. She was a monitor, and as she was one of the clever ones of the famliy, her mistress and Mr. Fletcher wished to make her a pupil teacher, if the expense could be met by the family, and Chris had ventured on undertaking to help her. It was almost as interesting and exciting to wonder whether she would pass her examination as whether Begonia Toddiana would win the prize.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN.

And well may the children weep before you,
They are weary ere they run;
They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory
Which is brighter than the sun.
They know the grief of man without its wisdom;
They sink in man's despair without its calm.

E. B. BROWNING.

THERE came to the Rectory a good many guests. One was Miss de Vaux, a cousin of Lady Clara, a not very youthful young lady, who was almost as excitable and as eager as Kate herself, who was much devoted to Mr. Melton's preaching, and made long visits. She went away to the house of Lady Clara's brother, about fifteen miles off, and about three weeks later came a clergyman who was collecting for the Society for the Protection of Waifs and Strays.

Kate was spared to go to the evening meeting,

which he held in the largest schoolroom. He gave a most thrilling and piteous description of the poor unhappy deserted children whom the good agents of the Society picked up more than half-starved, sleeping in gas-pipes, in gutters, or under newspapers; and, what was still worse, of poor little beings whose fathers inflicted fiendish tortures on them, twisting their arms, choking them, and putting them to such agony that they screamed at the very sight of a man; or of others whose tipsy mothers starved them, pawned their clothes, beat them, and left them to perish with hunger and cold.

Kate was in floods of tears of pity and indignation, and when she heard how the poor little creatures could be taken to kind homes, fostered, mothered, and taught holiness and love, and how much crippled in good deeds the Society was for want of funds, her heart burnt within her, and she longed to do something, some great deed on their behalf, which indeed would be an offering to the Father of the fatherless. She had had to buy winter clothes and boots, and there was not as much left of her wages as could be wished, but suddenly she recollected her gold bracelet, as she called it.

She had never worn it since that one time at the temperance concert at Bridgeworth, which seemed so long ago. She had never been among company who would have thought it suitable or ornamental to her, and she had grown much more circumspect as to her appearance. She thought of it as a childish thing, like those blue glass beads which had been a bone of contention with her schoolmistress ten years ago; but she believed it must be valuable, and there was something delightful to her imagination in casting her jewel bodily and secretly into the offertory, as she had read of heroines doing in books.

The collar was in a scent-bag, shut up in a dried fruit case, in a corner of her box, below all her summer dresses. She knelt down when the house was quiet, brought it out, and looked it over. It seemed to her more precious and curious than when she had first seen it, so perfectly made, one scale fitting over the other, and so light, and bending every way; but she only looked with the thought of its worth for the desolate children, wondering how many it would provide for. She had heard the story of General Gordon giving his gold Chinese medal with the inscription effaced in the time

of the Lancashire distress, and this further encouraged her; but—and perhaps this was the one flaw in what was on the whole a hearty and noble free-will offering of charity—she could not help enjoying the thought that all the rich people in the church would not know that the poor young maidservant was giving more than all of them.

The meeting was on Friday. She went about in high spirits all the next day, and on Sunday the offerings throughout the day were to be for the Waifs and Strays. She was so eager that she was sorry that it was not her turn to go to the Early Celebration; but at Morning Service, the sermon on "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me," made her heart thrill and leap, as she clasped tighter the little bag in which she still kept her treasure to prevent any jingling.

By-and-bye the churchwarden came round; she stretched out her hand, while she seemed scarcely able to breathe, and in went the gift on the top apparently of a good many pence and sixpences. Then she dropped on her knees, hid her face in her hands, and tried to pray that her gift might be blest and accepted.

Still, when she went back into the common light of day, she did hope that she should have the pleasure of hearing a little wondering over it, and speculation as to who could have presented it; but no such thing happened.

In fact, Mr. Melton made it a rule to have no gossip about the amount of offertory alms, or the kind in which they were given, or indeed upon any sacred subject, so that Kate, using all her ears when waiting at table, had hardly ever been able to pick up any church news.

Much she wondered over the fate of her collar, but she heard nothing that day, and on the next the clergyman went to stay at Lord de Vaux's to give a lecture at his village.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TORQUE.

> Shall the heirs of sinful blood
> Find joy unmixed in charity?
>
> J. KEBLE, *Christian Year.*

TWO days later, there was an arrival of Miss de Vaux at the Rectory, and presently Kate, as she answered the bell, heard the words, "Yes, Clara, I know it is my torque, and I lost it while I was staying here," in Miss de Vaux's vehement voice.

"Desire Joe to take this note up to Mr. Todd," said Mr. Melton; "he may wait for an answer."

Mr. Todd was one of the churchwardens, and Kate retired with the note. She had not the least notion what a torque meant. She would not have been quite so happy if she had heard all.

"I am sure I lost it here! That maid! I never liked her; she is a great deal too pretty, and has

a kind of gipsy look, and I caught her one day at my dressing-table fingering my things."

"I have always found her perfectly honest," said Lady Clara.

"People yield to sudden temptations, and then get alarmed," said the cousin.

"It is very improbable," said the clergyman.

"The improbable is what always happens," returned Miss de Vaux. "It can't be anything else! I am ready to swear to it. Now listen, Charles—" He had listened once before, but Miss de Vaux was never content without saying everything three or four times over. "My brother Herbert brought it to me from Norway, an heirloom—naughty people to sell it! He bought it in a farmhouse. It is one of the torques that the Northmen sea-kings used to wear round their necks, and he gave it to me, so I can't be mistaken in it. It is an exceedingly curious thing, for it is not known whether they made them themselves, or if they were spoil from the Celtic chiefs. I remember packing it up when I came here; but it is rather an awkward thing—it won't open, and won't go over one's head. The Vikings could never have taken it off, and it is too long for a bracelet; but I meant to show it

to Fanny's children, only I forgot it altogether till that Waif and Stray clergyman produced it in Fanny's drawing-room, and said he wanted a purchaser for it, as it had been put in the collection at your church. Then of course I exclaimed, 'It is my torque.'"

"Well, Florence, I have sent to the churchwarden to see whether it can be traced."

The churchwarden came in person, instead of answering the note. He recognized the little bag which Mr. Melton had kept, and declared that to the best of his belief it had been given by Lady Clara's parlour-maid.

"I told you so! I knew I was right," cried Miss de Vaux. "The horrid girl, to dispose of it in that way! No doubt she got frightened and dreaded a scene. You had better send for a policeman, Charles."

"I shall see her first alone," said Mr. Melton.

So he left the lady still talking with all her might to Lady Clara, and rang his study bell for Kate.

He first asked her whether it were she who had given a golden collar at the offertory.

"Yes, sir," she said, fully expecting to hear

something pleasant about it, and showing it in her countenance. "It was all I could do for those poor little dears."

"Will you tell me how you came by it?"

"My brother gave it to me, sir."

"Your brother? Are you sure?"

Kate paused a little, recollecting the commands not to mention Walter's discovery; but there was a certain sternness in her master's eye and voice which made her perceive that she had better tell the whole, so she replied, "He found it, sir."

"Found it? And where?" said Mr. Melton, leaping mentally to the conclusion that Florence de Vaux had dropped it, and some unsuspected brother had picked it up, somewhere about the town.

He was much surprised when Kate said, "He dug it out, sir, in a marsh by the river at home, at Lychford."

"How long ago?"

"More than three years ago, sir—four years ago come Lady Day."

"And you have never shown it to any one here?"

"No, sir. I never wore it here. I knew it was not becoming to my station, and kept it till I longed to do something for the poor little children."

"Where is your brother now?"

"He is at sea, sir."

"And can any of your family at home give an account of this?"

"Sir"—and now came Kate's tears—"I have not heard from my mother for ever so long, and my letter got returned."

"That's bad," muttered Mr. Melton. "Who was your clergyman?"

"The Reverend Otway, sir, North Lychford; but"—with some hesitation—"he would know of us by the name of Bulfinch."

"I thought your name was Finch?"

Kate was getting frightened, and her voice grew tearful. "Yes, they teased me so about Bulfinch, that I gave my name as only Finch. I hope it was not wrong, sir—no harm. I never thought no harm."

"I cannot quite call it harm," said Mr. Melton, "but it is very unfortunate that you cannot give a clearer account of yourself and your people." He had meant at first to go back and tell Miss de

Vaux that he was sure of Kate, and it must be a mistake; but these latter answers sounded so like prevarication that he was a good deal staggered, and after a few moments said, "I am sorry to tell you that Miss de Vaux believes that this is a bracelet of hers, which she missed when she left us."

"O sir! It is not true! Indeed it is not! I never took nothing." Kate was beginning to sob and asseverate between her sobs.

"Come, Kate, command yourself. I can scarcely believe that you would be capable of such an action, still less of disposing of the bracelet in such a manner; but if you really found it lying about anywhere in the garden or street" ("I didn't," sobbed Kate), "do not be afraid to tell the whole truth."

"I didn't, I didn't, sir. I have told you every word of truth. My brother Walter—he did find it—out in the marsh—and bits of gold and silver—and old money—old money—and he gave this to me."

"What became of the rest of the things you say he found?"

"I believe they sold them bit by bit to an old Jew at Awmouth; but I was only at home one

day, and I don't know; but indeed, sir, I am telling you every word of truth. I never saw or touched anything of Miss de Vaux's, except to tidy her toilet-table. There never was nothing like it there. How can she?"

Kate was almost hysterical by this time, and such violent crying and protestation never impress favourably. Mr. Melton spoke very gravely, "It is a very unfortunate matter. I am afraid that, unless you can prove that you have been in possession of the bracelet these three years as you say, then there can be only one conclusion. You had better go now and think over whether you can bring any satisfactory reference or proof."

When Mr. Melton brought back the account of his interview, Miss de Vaux was all the more indignant, and was ready to fly at him for being taken in by such a ridiculous story.

Lady Clara tried to say something for Kate, but was answered, "Oh yes! she is that kind of plausible girl who takes you all in. I shall send for the policeman, and he will soon get it out of her."

"Not just yet, Florence," said the Rector. "I have promised her to give her time to try if she can prove her story."

"She will be off," exclaimed Miss de Vaux, "off with that young man who is always after her. Why, I have seen him gossiping ever so long with her in the conservatory. Depend upon it, he is what she is pleased to call her brother."

"Oh! I know all about him," said Lady Clara; "he is her cousin."

"There!" interrupted Florence.

"He has been writing to try to find her mother's address," continued Lady Clara.

"Depend upon it, he is at the bottom of it," persisted the visitor; "I know what Clara's swans are."

The husband and wife held their peace, well knowing what a really good and kind woman Florence de Vaux was, but that she was subject to run almost wild on any matter that she took up, and as long as the mood lasted to talk in an exaggerated tone, as well as to think all opposition absurd. They themselves were much perplexed, and Lady Clara believed against appearances that the girl she really loved must be innocent, and Mr. Melton would have thought so also, if he had not distrusted excitability, and moreover thought the account—or rather no account—of the family very

unsatisfactory. Florence had given the waifs what Lord de Vaux estimated to be the value of the torque, and had brought it with her, but for the present it was locked up in Mr. Melton's drawer.

He meant, after luncheon, which was brought in by Jane—for poor Kate was in no condition to appear—to go and see what he could learn from young Crediton at the nursery ground.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TO THE RESCUE.

> Thou stick'st a dagger in me.
> I shall never see my gold again.
>
> SHAKESPEARE, *Merchant of Venice.*

MR. MELTON found Chris very busy over a houseful of geranium cuttings, and presently explained what he had come for, asking first about the relationship to the girl. All was above-board with Chris.

"Our mothers are cousins, and were very fond of each other when they were girls," explained he.

"And is her name Finch?"

"Bulfinch, sir; but her fellow-servants made game of the name, I believe, so she dropped the beginning."

"And, forgive me for asking you, is the family respectable?"

"No one ever said any harm of her mother, sir. She is an industrious, hard-working widow."

"And the father?"

"He has been dead for a good many years," said Chris, rather avoiding the subject.

"And there is a brother at sea?"

"Yes, sir, so I heard from my sister; but I do not know whether it was mentioned to you, sir, Mrs. Bulfinch never had much education, and the young woman has been in great trouble at not hearing from home."

"Ah!" with a sound of satisfaction at this verification. "She is in trouble now," and he proceeded to relate the history of the gold collar, Miss de Vaux's suspicions, and Kate's account of the matter, which to all the family sounded so improbable.

"I couldn't doubt it was true, sir," said Chris. "I found a whole lot of gold and silver things myself in the old bed of the river, the Awe, about four years ago, after the wet season."

"You did!"

"Yes, sir. There was a battle there at Lychford in the time of King Ethelbert, when the Saxons came up with the Danes, who had been pillaging the Abbey at Sebertstone," said Chris, almost as

if he had seen it, "and there were ever so many remains left in the marshes round the river. I'll show you how it was, sir."

Wherewith Chris took out his gardener's pencil and found a bit of brown paper, on which he drew, as he had done at the night school, only more roughly, a map of the Awe, with the two Lychfords, one on each side, marking the very spot of his own discovery, and explaining that another such was quite possible on the northern side.

"And what became of the things you found?"

"I took them up to the farmer. My father is a very particular man, and could not be happy a moment till I had carried them all up to my master, and he said they belonged to the Lord of the Manor, Lord Ellerslie, and a number of gentlemen and ladies came down to see about them. I could show you the account in the Awmouth newspaper, sir," he went on, at a sign of interest from Mr. Melton. "There were coins, King Egbert and King Ethelwolf, and crosses, all in a thing like a tankard, copper gilt, which I believe Lord Ellerslie gave for a flagon to Sebertstone Church."

"This is very curious, Crediton. I should like

to see the account in the paper. But did you never hear of your cousin's discovering anything of the same kind?"

"No, sir. You see they lived on the farther side of the river, and we never saw much of them. Besides," Chris felt bound to say, "Mrs. Bulfinch is an ignorant woman, and the master had the name of a hard man, and the lads were, I'm afraid, rather loose fish, so I should not wonder if they had kept it close; but I don't believe that the young woman would ever do anything she knew to be dishonest. I am sure," looking up into Mr. Melton's face with his clear, straightforward eyes, "she is as honest and good, religious a girl as ever lived, sir."

"So I have always thought her," said Mr. Melton, "and I am much encouraged by what you say. I will not detain you now, but in the evening perhaps you will bring up this newspaper cutting, and see Kate, and try if she can bring any proofs that will satisfy Miss de Vaux."

Chris had no difficulty in hunting up the column of the "Awmouth Chronicle," which indeed he preserved as a sort of medal, a title of honour, and he carried it up to the Rectory in the evening.

He found the servants there all on Kate's side. She was always good-tempered, obliging, and merry with them; they believed her religion a real thing, and were very angry with Miss de Vaux for suspecting her, and bringing an accusation "fit to take away a poor girl's character." Indeed, that lady, having grown up to more attendance than she was able in her present circumstances to afford, gave a good deal of trouble, and required much attention where she was visiting. "So unlike my lady," said Jane, so that they were not at all disposed to feel with her. They hoped that she would be convinced before Friday, for she had gone away declaring that otherwise she should have the girl summoned to appear the next day at the Petty Sessions—and such a thing, even if nothing were proved, might always be remembered against her.

All this Chris heard before Kate had finished waiting at dinner, whither she had ventured since Miss de Vaux had departed. Lady Clara's kindness had done her good, and both master and mistress showed that they believed in her; but she was very tearful and shaky, and when Chris followed her into her little pantry, he was really

afraid for the moment that she was going to fall into his arms, and he backed to the door.

"O Chris! are you come to help me? Dear Chris! how good of you!" and she fell into one of her passions of sobbing, exclaiming at intervals that she could not guess how any one could suppose her to be so wicked as to steal a thing, and give it in that way "like a hyp—hyp—hypocrite."

"Come, come, Katie, don't take on that way! It doesn't do a bit of good, and how is a chap to know what is to be done if you go on that way? Come now, was it Wat who found it?"

"There's nobody to speak for me. No one knows where Wat is, nor poor mother neither. There's no one to speak for me—I'm as good as lost. Nasty spiteful thing! to go and take away my character, as is all a poor servant has in the world, and when I thought I would give something worth—" on came the sobs again, and Chris spoke sharply, "I can't stand all night to see you take on. Get yourself together and speak a little reasonable if you can. Of course, Wat found this thing?"

The scolding did help Kate to a little more self-control, and she managed to tell him as much as

CHRIS CREDITON COMES TO KATE'S RESCUE.

Page 158.

SOCIETY LIBRARY.

she knew of the story of the discovery, and how she had begged the collar from Walter, not knowing its value, and without any idea that it was not the property of the finder, since, to her mind, it belonged to nobody.

"And did you never show it to any one?" asked Chris.

"Not here, I didn't. I'd got to know it was not respectable to put on gold and costly array—not for a girl in service—and I did think of better things, Chris, indeed I did, and I never recollected it till I wanted to help those poor children; and to think that it should have brought all this on me."

"Perhaps it is to do you good in the end; as father always says, 'He above knows best.' Who knows?" said Chris. "But, tell me, did you never wear it at all?"

"Yes, once at the temperance concert at Bridgeworth, when I recited 'Exit Tommy.'"

"And did no one notice it?"

"Yes, your Alice did, and so did Miss Thompson, our Bible-class lady; she asked how I got it, and I said my brother gave it me, which was real true, Chris. Only she did ask if it was Jem in India. And I didn't say no, because mother bade

me let on nothing to nobody. I wouldn't now, Chris; but I was a bad girl then, though I never stole nothing, but I've been a better girl since I've been confirmed—indeed I have."

"Then our Alice could speak for you," interrupted Chris, in a much more hopeful voice, "and so could this lady, Miss Thompson. I remember Alice used to talk about her. And your mother could tell all about finding the things."

"Ah, but poor mother! Nobody knows where to find her."

"I'll tell you what, Kate. Mr. Todd will give me leave when he hears how it is, and I'll run down to Bridgeworth, and get your mother's address, and see whether Miss Thompson would speak for you."

"O Chris! dear Chris! if you would, if you could save me, I would never, never forget it. I should be beholden to you forever," she cried with clasped hands.

"There now," said Chris, retreating again from her demonstrations. "Mind, I don't say as I can, or that anything will come of it, but I'll do my best; for it is a shame that such things should be laid to an innocent girl."

"Innocent! Oh, say it again, Chris; it does me good to hear you say it."

"That's stuff, Katie. If your own conscience says it, and God Almighty knows it, that's enough," said Chris, bluntly. "There now, don't cry again. You gave the thing to God. He will take care it is all right with you."

"So my lady says; but oh! I do like to hear you—"

But Chris said good night, and was off. He was very sorry for her, very indignant at the accusation, and very anxious to help his kinswoman and countrywoman; but she made him horribly shy, and he did wish she would not be so affectionate.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CHAMPION.

A gentle knight came pricking o'er the plain,

. . . . . .

Bright, faithful, true was he, in deed and word.

SPENSER, *Faerie Queen.*

MR. TODD consented, though he could not well spare Crediton, who was just now the only man to be trusted with the stoves on frosty nights, since, just as his father loved the crops and fields as if they were his children, so Chris loved the plants, and it would have gone to his heart to see them perish; whereas to the other men they were merely the means of livelihood. It was shepherd or hireling.

However, Mr. Todd could pity the accused maiden, nor did he wish that the donation in his collecting bag should rest under the suspicion of being stolen goods. So Chris was to have all Thursday, going very early and returning by the

night mail. His early train was very early indeed, quite in the dark; but it brought him to the well-known streets of Bridgeworth when every one was up and stirring, and he could get a cup of hot coffee and a ham sandwich at the station. Moreover, it was near enough to Christmas for him to pick up a collection of penny presents that would put the small ones at home into a state of ecstasy.

Then he made his way to his elder sister Alice, who was in the same place where she had first gone out, but seven years had brought her to be the nurse instead of the nursery-maid; and she had just sent her charges down to breakfast when she received an urgent message to come and speak to her brother for a few minutes.

He had to tell her his business hastily. "O dear Katie!" she exclaimed, "to think of her getting into such trouble all by her gift! Oh yes, I saw the gold bracelet that night. It was a real beauty—very curious links of gold, twisted together. I sat and looked at it, but I could not ask about it because they were singing, and the moment I began she was called off, and we never came together again. I was sorry, for I never wished her good-bye."

"Should you know it again?"

"I don't know, I didn't see it very close, but I could speak to what it was like. O Chris! don't let them have me up in court."

"I don't think it will come to that; but you had rather *that* than let poor Kate suffer?"

"Oh! yes, yes; I'm not so selfish."

Alice further gave him the address of Miss Thompson, who, as she said, was just the same as ever. Indeed, it struck him as strange to find everything going on as usual at Bridgeworth when he had known so many changes. Miss Thompson was one of the ladies who for years and years never seem to alter, but to train generations of children and G.F.S. girls one after another like an institution. She remembered Kate Bulfinch, and was glad to hear of her being such as young Crediton reported, and with an effort she remembered having noticed the bracelet, and thought it unsuitable. She fancied Kate had told her that it came from the brother in India, but allowed that it might have been as the girl averred, namely, that there was no denial of her own question. She was very much touched by Kate's disposal of the ornament, and promised with all her kind

heart to come to Balminster if needful, and to take care of Alice, and even of Mrs. Bulfinch on the journey. To tell the truth, she was one of those bustling people who would rather have liked the expedition, and she made Chris promise to telegraph to her if she were wanted. She wished him to stay and have something to eat; but it was little past eleven o'clock, and he hoped to get home by dinner-time, though he took the precaution of buying a great sausage on his way, in case he should find the home meal not calculated to receive a great hungry youth, and thus "mother should be put about."

For he found all the homely old considerations arising in his mind as he trudged through the heavy sticky lanes, and he began to whistle his old plough-boy tunes, when the steeple of South Lychford rose before him. The clock there chimed out twelve o'clock, and as he passed the school he heard the chanted Grace ringing out, and the measured tramp beginning, and pausing, he was rushed upon with a scream of "Our Chris!" by Amy and Jem, while Ben, of old the baby, hung back rather in awe of the well-dressed brother, though it was only a few months since

they had met. Lucy, following more demurely, reproached the little man for not remembering "Brother Kis." And Ben was soon riding home gloriously on his shoulders, while Amy and Jem raced headlong in on mother with the news that Chris was come!

Poor mother! it gave her a turn, and she had to be assured that he was well and prosperous, and nothing amiss with him, before she could enjoy the sight of her tall, good-looking, bright-faced son, "quite the gentleman," Lucy said, in his neat tweed suit. The sausage was not at all unacceptable, though Chris could see that the staple of the meal, a potato pie, had more meat in it than ever was afforded on a week-day in his time.

Father and Tom were just at hand, old Kit looking fairly well, though more bent, and walking as if his knees were tied together, and Tom as tall as Chris himself, except for the slouch out of which athletics had trained the elder brother. Tom had man's wages, and had no aspirations beyond Lychford, so his father was satisfied, and was now quite contented with, and even proud of, his smart gentleman of a son, though it was not his way to show it. When Chris explained his

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business, the first comment from the old man was: "Don't ye tell me you are going to take up with one of them trolloping lot of Bulfinches."

"I never thought of such a thing," returned Chris, the colour for the very first time rising in his face; "but I couldn't see an innocent maid sent to prison for nothing at all."

"Don't put such things in the lad's head," said his mother, rather sorry to see him turn as red as his dear Begonia Toddiana.

However, no one could say that every exertion should not be made on behalf of an innocent young girl, and when Mrs. Crediton had heard the whole story, she exclaimed, "Poor Bessy Bulfinch! Think of that! And I have never been over to see her since her husband's burial. I'll put on my bonnet, Chris, and walk over with you. Lucy, you'll be in time to see to Daddy's tea, if I'm not home in time."

No one had a word to say against this arrangement. Chris was delighted, and the younger children were made happy with the contents of his pockets, rather against the wishes of prudent Lucy, who declared that they would never be able to attend to their lessons for thinking about

their lucky bags; but Chris could not be denied the pleasure of giving the things, and of hearing Amy's scream of joy, and seeing Ben's half-terrified laugh as Jack-in-the-box leapt up. He did not begin to fidget about mother being in time till he had carried Ben back on his shoulder to the Infant School. Mother was ready at last, having really made as much haste as was possible to a housewife with everything on her own hands, and very nice she looked in her neat mourning; and indeed she was far less thin and tired-looking than Chris ever remembered to have seen her, for life was really much less hard and anxious with her than in old times, before he and Alice and even Susan could give any help. Poor old Granny was gone to her rest, well content, as she said, "to give you no more trouble, my dear, but you've been a right good daughter to me, thank the Lord!" Tom earned his living, and Lucy brought in something. Mrs. Crediton declared that she felt quite like a lady, only it was lonesome now that even baby was at school all day.

She confided to Chris on their walk that she was anxious about Jem. He was much sharper than Tom, and would pass the fifth standard at

the next inspection. He wanted to go to the new works at North Lychford; but father would not hear of it, and the men and boys there were said to be a rowdy set; yet there really seemed no work for him at the farms in the parish.

Chris wondered whether he could get Mr. Todd to take him on as a boy to sweep, weed paths, and do errands, and whether father would let him go. That walk was a great pleasure and comfort to both mother and son, who could speak freely to each other and much more deeply and helpfully than usual, as they went through the long lanes, where the hedges had decked themselves in a hundred gay tints, and red, pink, and purple berries shone out here and there. Chris could not help pausing now and again to gather a bright shining blackberry, while he told his mother about the handsome climbing American brambles that were so hard to rear.

The perilous bridge at the mill had been replaced by an iron one, with good hand-rails. It was not half so pretty in a picture, but much more pleasant to cross, and when they were over it they found themselves in a new world.

CHAPTER XX.

WHIN COMMON.

All the treasure had turned into slate stones.
Old Fairy Tale.

NOT only was the bridge new and passable, but the mill wheel was no longer turning and dripping slowly, and the building itself was being changed by additions of red brick. The lane, which used to be a mere cart track with deep banks covered with brushwood above and ferns below, had been widened and the banks cut down, and where it was not miry, it was very stony. Over the lowered hedgerows where Mr. Hunter's barns and stacks used to be seen there arose red brick walls, chimneys, and roofs of corrugated iron over long sheds, and there were rows of red houses with slated roofs where the thatched cottages used to be. Not a trace of Mrs. Bulfinch's old house and drying ground could

be seen, and, as Mrs. Crediton observed, she would not have known where she was but for the church tower under the sloping woods that closed in the valley.

Thither the mother and son bent their course, hoping to find some old inhabitant who could direct them to Mrs. Bulfinch. Finally Chris had to make inquiry at the "White Stag," and learnt from the landlord there that Mrs. Bulfinch had moved "up Awmouth way," out to Whin Common.

Chris knew where Whin Common was, having been there with his father in his carter days. It was nearly a mile farther on, and was a forlorn-looking place, covered with dwarf furze, on which a few blossoms lingered, mixed with bracken turning yellow and brown, and with a disconsolate donkey and some noisy geese in the midst. There were at intervals round the border, crazy-looking huts such as squatters build on common land—or used to build—for people are more particular now, and waving in front of one of these, upon very frail sticks, hung sheets, red petticoats, stockings, and the like, which Mrs. Crediton recognised as her cousin's banner, and exclaimed, "There must be Bessy Bulfinch, as sure as I'm alive."

And even as she spoke, from one of the shabbiest of the hovels, not much higher or better than a pig-sty, close upon the road, without a bit of garden, except, perhaps, the green moss and ferns that covered the thatch, there came Mrs. Bulfinch herself, to take in her clothes. As usual, she had her coarse holland apron; but her hair, under her black net cap, was all abroad, and almost white, and her face was furrowed, haggard, and aged, so that Chris could not help thinking that the three years and a half had made her as much older as they had made his mother younger.

She did not know them at first; she would hardly have known Chris any way; but when Mrs. Crediton exclaimed, "Bess, Bess Bulfinch, don't you know me?" she cried out, "Alice Crediton, it bain't ever you! Oh my!" and she gave a little sob; then with a start, "You bain't come to tell me no bad news," and she trembled like a shaky woman, and seemed to have lost her old hale hearty way.

Something of reassurance Mrs. Crediton said, while both helped to take down the linen, and as Chris pulled out the pegs, she looked up at him, and exclaimed, "It ain't never little Chris!" So

in the two women went, while Chris lingered outside, glad to let his mother begin the history of Kate's trouble; but presently he was called in. The hovel, thanks to Mrs. Bulfinch's tidy habits, was much better looking than the outside promised, being papered with old newspapers and advertisements, and there was enough of the old familiar furniture to crowd up the one room, which was as steamy and oppressive with heat as Mr. Todd's innermost forcing-house. Chris told his history, and Mrs. Bulfinch, with the tears running down the deep channels under her eyes, sighed, "My poor dear Kate! That all the trouble should have come on her too, poor dear! that was as innocent as a lamb. Only what should she be giving such things to them that had no call on her! But she was always a generous girl that never knew how to keep anything to herself. To think of her coming to be called a thief! Oh dear! oh dear! I wish Wat had never come on the nasty things; we've had nothing but trouble and worry ever since!"

"Please tell me, Mrs. Bulfinch, about how Wat did find them," said Chris. "That's what is wanted to clear Kate."

Mrs. Bulfinch began to tell in a rambling kind of way, and Chris tried to set it down in his little memorandum book with his pencil; but she declared that to see him write, write there, just like a born lawyer, made her that nervous, she could not go on. So, after he had gathered all he could from her, he went outside, and, as his master had advised, put all down, and then came back and read it to her, and she allowed that it was all true, and even signed it in an odd scrawl.

Meantime, much had been explained. Mrs. Bulfinch could scarcely write more than was enough, by long practice, to enable her to mark off washing bills and sign receipts, and when Walter was gone, she had no heart to write and tell Kate. The return of Kate's letters was explained by the move to Whin Common; and besides, the whole of the post-office arrangements at North Lychford had been altered, and the letters came through new hands, who had never heard of the Bulfinches, and, after the modern fashion of overtaxed postmen, found it easier to write, "Not known here," and to send the letter back, than to make inquiries. Thus Mrs. Bulfinch had never known of Kate's change of service, nor

had Kate known of her mother's change of abode, nor indeed that her soldier brother had died in India. Mrs. Bulfinch, poor woman! had indeed gone through a great deal. She was very lonely, having thus lost sight of the children whom she loved, and she was poorer than ever before, death and removal having diminished her customers. She had been almost compelled to take her present abode, because she could nowhere else get space for drying her linen without paying for it; but it gave her long walks in fetching and carrying, and there was enough to account for her worn looks.

Her hospitable nature wanted to give them tea, which Mrs. Crediton could not but accept; though she found it really sad to hear her cousin muttering something about its being a long way to the shop. The guests were afraid to eat more than a small slice of the half loaf, with a little salt butter, for they guessed that there was all her evening—if not her morning—meal.

One thing was cheering. There was an exceedingly ugly little corrugated iron edifice, like a tin canister, goffered all over, with a small cross at the top, and as a tumult of very young children

came shouting out of it, Mrs. Bulfinch told them that it was an infant school and chapel, and either a curate or a lay-reader came out on Sundays and held a simple service. "He do lay it down so plain," she said, "and the prayers be so easy and so hearty that I likes 'em."

"I'm right glad of that, Bessy," said Mrs. Crediton.

"Ah, you and your master, you always was for your church; but one gets so much to do with a family coming on that one hasn't no time. But 'tis lonesome here, and one can step in without much of a best bonnet, you see," said Mrs. Bulfinch, "and it seems to do one a bit of good."

"I'm sure of it, dear," said Mrs. Crediton.

And when the visit was over and the two women were standing outside the door, while Chris strolled up to get a closer look at the queer little mission erection, Mrs. Bulfinch went on: "Well, to be sure, what a gentleman he do look! And all along of the notice they took of him about that pot of gold. Alice, I told you that you were a fool about it, to get nothing more out of it. I don't know but what you might call me the fool.

Nothing has ever gone well since we laid hands on that unlucky gold! Wat grew unsettled—and—and he that was to have been my comfort in my old age, he went away and left me; and here's poor Katie in trouble, and like to have her character taken away about it."

"No, no, that will all come right, and she will write to you, and come and see you."

"Oh, this is no place for a likely girl like her; but my poor, poor Wat! If I could only see him again—but I never shall. I shall go down all alone to my grave, I that have been the mother of seven."

Mrs. Crediton said what she could to cheer her and give her hope, both on earth and in heaven, but it was needful to leave her, as Chris had to see his sister and Miss Thompson before he returned to Balminster, since each had promised to write down what she remembered of the gold bracelet; and, besides, Miss Thompson was to communicate with Mrs. Bulfinch in case their personal evidence was needed.

"I never did see such a place, mother," said Chris, as they passed the "tin school," as the

children called it, on their rather weary way homewards. "It never would seem like one's prayers there."

"And yet, with God's blessing, I do believe it is putting poor Bessy Bulfinch on the right road at last," said Mrs. Crediton, with all her heart, though she listened with delight as Chris launched out about the beautiful harvest decorations (many of them from Mr. Todd's garden), and the lovely music at Balminster.

CHAPTER XXI.

POSITIVE.

I will have it!
SHAKESPEARE, *Taming of the Shrew.*

CHRIS did not get to his lodging till one o'clock in the morning; but, for once in a way, and for such a cause, his landlady had arranged for him to get in, and he was up in time to run round by the Rectory on his way to his work. Kate was watching for him, but it was only possible—or he thought it so—to tell her that it was all right, give into her hand the envelope in which he had put all the evidence which he had collected, and assure her that her mother was quite well, and that the letters had missed from both having changed their residence.

Kate was quiet now. There was no more hysterical crying, only a desperate clasp of her champion's hand, and thanks which seemed half choked.

She looked exceedingly pale, as if she had been awake all through the two nights. Somehow, after all he had done for her, Chris could not help feeling much more warmly towards her than he had ever done before; perhaps because it had been put into his head, which had hitherto been only the head of a good industrious boy.

His master sent him to work in the Rectory garden that he might be at hand when wanted; but he did not see Kate, for Lord de Vaux was coming with his cousin, and they were to stay for the night, so that the maids were taken up with preparing the rooms.

If Kate had not known that her master and mistress were perfectly satisfied by the papers, it would have been hard to make the bed of her prosecutor.

By-and-bye they came. Lord de Vaux, knowing nothing of Kate, believing his sister to be rather easily imposed upon, and having only heard Florence's version of the story, had come looking very grave, and quite prepared to escort the lady to one of the city magistrates to apply for a summons. How Kate longed to follow them into the drawing-room, and see the effect of the papers!

"Be your friend's name Effie David?" asked the page boy after breakfast. "For I heard my lady say Effie David would get you off."

They were not affidavits, but still Lady Clara met her brother and cousin triumphantly, and put the envelope into the hands of the latter with "There, Florence!"

Florence looked. "Really, I don't see. This is only the old woman's story, just as the young man told her to say. Look"—handing the little book to Lord de Vaux—"'Alice Crediton,' 'Emily Thompson.' Why, they have nothing to say but that the girl had a gold bracelet three years ago. I dare say she had, or something looking like gold."

"H'm," said Lord de Vaux. "You see, this Emily Thompson says that she is ready to come and bear witness, and bring up the other two. Who is she?"

"A lady at Bridgeworth—yes, the Band of Hope secretary," said Lady Clara.

"A benevolent lady," burst out Miss de Vaux. "I don't believe in benevolent ladies." At which both her auditors burst out laughing; for each would have described her as a benevolent lady,

quite as ready to run wild for a protégée as she was at present to go against Kate.

"Really," said Lord de Vaux, after reading all the documents through, "if the girl can bring up all these three witnesses, I do not think there would be any chance of your getting a conviction."

"Not if we telegraphed to Herbert to come and identify the torque?"

"Hardly. It may not be the only torque in existence. Don't you agree with me, Charles?"

"I am perfectly satisfied," said Mr. Melton.

"Come, Florence, why should you be so bitter against the poor girl?" said Lord de Vaux. "You have your torque, and why should you hunt her down?"

"I hate hypocrisy and deceit, and I can't bear Charles and Clara to be taken in," said Florence, half sullenly.

"Thank you," said Lady Clara, sarcastically. "Will you speak to this young man who has been a knight-errant in Kate's cause?" she added to her brother. "I see him putting in the bulbs. Then you can judge whether he and Kate are in conspiracy with each other to rob us."

"And you won't come with me to the Mayor?" said Florence.

"No, certainly not. You would only get yourself laughed at."

"When the fact remains that my very remarkable torque was lost in this house, and that woman, Katherine Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Bulfinch —which is it?—for she goes by a false name, put it into the offertory bag. I dare say, as you tell me, that I might not get justice. There would be plenty of perjury, and these town magistrates would all believe it; so no doubt it is of no use, and I must give it up."

Lady Clara could hardly help mortifying her cousin by clapping her hands.

And when Lord de Vaux came back from his conference with Chris, he was perfectly satisfied that the young man spoke the truth to the best of his knowledge, and that the story of Kate Bulfinch's offering was quite genuine, though there still remained the fact that Florence de Vaux's property was not accounted for.

Indeed, the young lady was still so much annoyed that she declared that, though she had no quarrel with Charles and Clara, she could not

stay and be waited on by that artful woman, and should go home at once to her sister in London. She telegraphed at once, packed up her bag, and started by the evening train, taking the collar with her, sending word by Lord de Vaux that the rest of her goods should be despatched after her.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DISCOVERY.

Little Bo Peep
Has lost her sheep,
And cannot tell where to find them;
Let them alone
And they'll soon come home,
And bring their tails behind them.

OH, my dear Clara, what shall I say?—what shall I do?—how shall I ask your poor good girl's pardon, or yours, or Charles's? The very first thing I saw when I opened my jewel case was my own torque reposing on its blue velvet! I had meant to take it, but finding it would not go conveniently into my dressing-box, I left it, and there it had been all the while! And if I had sworn, or Herbert had sworn to it, we should have been fearfully wrong; for now I see them together, the scales of mine are smaller, and do not hang so loosely as the

other. Oh! what has not your young knight-errant, as you may well call him, saved me from! Please give him the amount of his journeys—I do not dare to offer him any more; and here is a small attempt at showing poor Kate my sorrow for the hasty accusation, and what I made her suffer. I shall not be happy till she has written her pardon to me.

"I am going this very day to take the torque to the office of the Waifs and Strays at the Church House, to whom it properly belongs. Please write me your forgiveness, dear Clara, and Charles's, though I shall be ashamed ever to show my face in Balminster again. Never more shall I be sure of anything.

"Your loving and bitterly ashamed,

"F. de V."

"Poor Flo!" cried Lady Clara.

Mr. Melton burst out into a hearty fit of laughing.

"I must ring and tell Kate! Oh! Look at this! It is all she can do; but, poor thing! it is more than she can well afford, considering that she began by redeeming the torque from the Waifs."

"Never mind. There can't be a better way of teaching a lesson than a little personal inconvenience."

Kate was really struck speechless with joy, and grew so pale that Mr. Melton was alarmed and left her to his wife.

When she saw the present Miss de Vaux had sent, the colour came back, and she said, "O my lady! it is very kind in her, but I don't somehow feel as if I ought to take it."

"I do not think Miss de Vaux will feel as if you forgave her if you do not, Kate," said Lady Clara, "though I quite understand your feeling. Would you like us to keep it and put it into the savings-bank?"

"Well, my lady, since she is so good, I should like to have it for poor mother. Crediton was telling me, my lady, that times have gone so very hard with her, I was sorry to think all my last wages were gone, and I was looking out a few clothes to send her; for Crediton told me his mother thought she had not warm clothes enough for such a damp place. And she said, did poor mother, that if she could only get a little pig, it would be sort of company for her, and she would

not feel it so lonesome. So I'll send it to her, and thank Miss de Vaux, and you, my lady."

Kate had found her tongue, and to some purpose, for to the collection of goods which were not quite nice enough for Rectory service, including one dress that did indeed cost some self-denial, Lady Clara added a good plaid wrap with a burnt corner, rather too remarkable to be bestowed on a parishioner of her own, but which would warm Mrs. Bulfinch by night or day as might suit her best.

There was no difficulty now as to the address, and Kate was happiness itself as she wrote to her mother, told her what to look out for at Awmouth station, and sent the enclosure.

On one point there was still a little doubt. The Society for Waifs and Strays were uncertain whether they ought to accept the offering of the gold collar without the consent of the person who had the first right to it. They would hardly have obtained it if Farmer Hunter had been still alive, but the childless widow was living at Awmouth, fairly well off, and she had always been a very different person from him, meek, subdued, and showing little will of her own. When she heard

that the collar had actually been offered at the altar on behalf of the poor desolate children, she declared that she should be afraid to take it back again; and indeed, what she heard of the Waifs and Strays touched and interested her so much in them, that it ended in her taking two small orphan girls into her house, whom she found better company than even the little pig was to Mrs. Bulfinch.

The torque was taken to the learned, who decided that it was very precious indeed, and proved just the missing link in the history of the Northmen, and it was purchased for a museum with a large sum of money, enough to start three waifs at least in the way of good training. So that Kate's offering, though it brought her pain and sorrow at first, really turned out full of blessing.

For things with her mother began to look up. Walter, bronzed, manly, and sailor-like, suddenly found his way one evening to Whin Common. An accident on board ship had taught him the value of home and mother, and he did not mean to make long American voyages again. There was plenty of employment in the little traders at Awmouth, and there he meant to stay, a greatly

steadied and sobered man. He never fully told his experiences, but they had made him much more considerate and affectionate to his mother, as well as more thoughtful and serious-minded. He made her live in a neat new house on the borders of Whin Common, very like the first houses which children draw on their slates, but very comfortable, and within reach of the "tin church." And there began what, though she hardly knew it, was the really happiest time of Mrs. Bulfinch's life, above all when Kate came to pay her a visit.

As to Kate and Chris Crediton, they are not engaged, and as both are under twenty-two this is just as well, but they take walks in the nursery garden on summer Sunday afternoons. Kate knows the longest names of the flowers, and Chris now and then drinks tea in the Rectory servants' hall.

What this may come to depends a good deal on the steadiness and power of constancy in the two young people. If anything happened to call either away from Balminster, most likely there would be an absolute engagement. Or, if the foreman gave up, and his pretty banksia- and clematis-covered lodge were offered to Crediton,

or perhaps Lord de Vaux's lodge and gardens, most likely matters would be hastened; but in the meantime they are both content to wait, and it is to be hoped it will prove that each has found the best treasure there is on earth.

FINIS.

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